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NATURE, EXTENT, AND PROVINCE

OF

HUMAN REASON,

CONSIDERED.

Σκοπει εν, μη το Φως το εν σοι, σκοτος εστιν.
Ει γαρ το Φως το εν σοι, σκοτος εστι, το σκοτος ποσον.

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DEDICATION.

To the Right Reverend

SAMUEL,

LORD BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S.

MY LORD,

THE appearance of the following pages, in their present form, originates from some incidental conversation, in a small circle of friends to *Revealed Religion*, *Philosophic Truth*, and *Sound Learning*; a conversation, of which your Lordship's late CHARGE was the valuable occasion and source.

To minds, whose attachment to the SACRED SCRIPTURES is something more than national, or professional; which *feel*, what they admire, and esteem; the departure of the times, from the obvious principles of divine Revelation, has long been a matter of sincere, and, it is hoped, of benevolent sensibility; a sensibility, which they would be ready, and which indeed they ought, to disavow, were they not persuaded, that it is founded on the *Venustum*, the *Honestum*, the

Decorum of things. But, in the manly zeal, in the liberal firmness, in the extensive erudition, and in the evangelical truths, which they conceive to be displayed in the above Charge, the almost despairing cause of *genuine, apostolical Christianity*, begins to revive.

Very cheerfully do we subscribe to the sentiments of a noble author, when he tells us, that, "In what form or manner soever *Criticism* may appear among us, or *Critics*, choose to exercise their talents, it can become none, besides the grossly superstitious or ignorant, to be alarmed at this *Spirit*, so long as it regards the rules of *Decency*. For, from the consideration of ancient, as well as modern times, it appears, that the cause, and interest, of Critics, is the same with that of Wit, Learning, and good Sense."

Under this conviction, we deprecate the *severity* of the fastidious reader; we solicit the *candor* of those, whose pursuit is *things*, not *sounds*. Our appeal is, to the understanding and the heart. Elegance of composition, we profess to ad-

-Taste, we approve--but *TRUTH*

ultimatum. Let *That* be secure.

and let Folly, let Sophistry, let Falsehood be detected and exposed.

But, whatever may be the deference and respect most justly due, and which we are most willing to render to the united efforts of a set of gentlemen, who have engaged in the arduous and beneficial office of *Reviewers;* whom we may very properly consider as forming a sort of *Literary Phalanx;* and whose judgments, we could wish, for the sake of Truth and Piety, were as *impartial*, as they are able, we are still of opinion with your Lordship, that,

"Religion and Science are very different things; and the objects of different faculties. Science is the object of natural Reason; religious Truth, of Faith. Faith, like the natural faculties, may be improved by exercise, but, in its beginning, it is unquestionably a distinct gift of God."*

If *Faith*, in the general idea of it, be considered, as the unreserved submission or surrender of the understanding and heart to the *revealed Will of God*, it cer-

*1 Cor. ii. Eph. ii, 8.

tainly must be considered, as a kind of faculty, entirely distinct from what is universally meant by *human Reason.* Because, it seems to be the peculiar property, the province it *may* be a moral excellency of Faith, in its relation to the Divine Being, cordially to receive *that*, upon the Divine testimony alone, *the reason* of which it cannot at present discover. It may be one of the highest exercises of true goodness, to say, in this case of the supreme Governor of the world, *Stat pro ratione, voluntas;* the Will of God being the first cause, and eternal basis, of all moral obligation.

As to the objection, hereafter sufficiently discussed, as if, upon *this* principle, the moral Governor of the universe was a mere *arbitrary Being*—we need only remark in this place, that, "A Being, of *infinite* freedom and independency, must necessarily act according to his own sovereign will and pleasure. If every thing received its existence from him; if every thing, which exists, be the effect of his Will, and he can do nothing, but *because* he wills it, must he not be *as arbitrary*, as he is *powerful*? And,

though *Will* and *Power*, when considered as blind or imperfect faculties in man, may pass for *humor* and *caprice*, yet, as attributes of God, they must have the *perfection* of God. And, if the Will of God be in the highest state of perfection, *as such*, then, we have the highest reason to love and adore him, *because* he is *arbitrary*---because he acts according to his own *independent* and *all-perfect Will*.

Nothing can be more evident, my Lord, to those who are in the habit of *reflecting* and *discriminating* between true and false, specious and real, than that, as there have been several things, which have not had the essence of *Virtue* in them, which have nevertheless been mistaken for virtue—there are several things, which have been mistaken for *Reason*, which are as far from the thing itself, as Skepticism is from the most established axioms; or, as the date of the Chinese empire, from forty thousand years.

It has been very much the fashion in all our modern productions, which have the most distant reference to Religion, to

denominate the present age, *The age of Reason;* and to panegyrize it, as superlatively distinguishable for *Liberality of sentiment.* That it may be *The Age of reasoning Pride,* we will not dispute. And, inasmuch as it has been said, to have the strong outline of *Liberality of Sentiment,* we are perfectly agreed with your Lordship, that, in this equivocal and undefinable phrase, "A *profane indifference* is made to pass for an *accomplishment.*"

Will your Lordship permit us, for the sake of *good humor,* which, we apprehend, is no enemy to true religion, to introduce here a little anecdote, in allusion to your own idea? The Polish historians record, that, after the death of *Stephen,* one of the bravest of their kings, there came ambassadors to *Poland,* from the *Cham of Tartary,* who was a candidate for the Crown. They had instructions to represent to the *Diet,* "That the *Cham* was a Prince of great power; and that, as to his personal qualities, he was temperate and sober. That, being informed re were differences among them about *gion, he gave* them assurances, that

their Pope should be his Pope, and *their Luther be his Luther*, just as they pleased to determine."

To *Liberality of Sentiment*, very closely in alliance with this, and to uncommon pretensions to superior *Reason*, we are much indebted for the repeated and various attempts which have been made upon our civil and ecclesiastical constitution. By one of *their* disciples, who announces himself the humble echo of a modern Heresiarch and restless Sectary, your Lordship was, not long since, addressed in the following remarkable style:

"I wish it could be uttered with a voice, that would penetrate every corner of the nation, and that could rouse *the people* of Britain *to rise* as one man, to *require* that the public service of Religion be cleansed from these pollutions," *(meaning the doctrinal Articles of our Church)* "which press hard on the consciences of the most worthy among the clergy—which drive many to infidelity—which render others indifferent to Religion—and which keep from the Church, members, whose talents, and

whose weight of character,
it eminent service."—W
state of the Church shall r
assistance, it will be v
doubt, to sacrifice *both* fo
such talents, and *such* c
then, so long as the P
with such outrageous a
effusions as these, it w
for them to forget the
Hudibras, or the less
The Tale of a Tub.

We have seen, tha
step forward to asse
principles of revel
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Justification by Fai
of the Divine As
Spirit, it is ascrib
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the expediency
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it is to be charg
of *Bigotry* a
the effrontery
ed with the

deserves, the *decent indignation* is to be denominated ecclesiastical imperiousness and insolence.

Leaving, however, such writers, and such writings, to the exposition of their own illiberality, and to the censure, they will be sure to meet with from the most respectable and pious division of our Dissenting Brethren; your Lordship, we presume, will recollect, it is somewhere observed, by the illustrious and immortal *Bacon*, "Nobis res salubris videtur, et imprimis utilis, si Tractatus instituatur sobrius et diligens, qui de usu Rationis humanæ in Theologicis præcipiat. Ejusmodi tractatum inter desiderata ponimus; et, *Sophronem*, sive de legitimo usu Rationis humanæ in divinis nominamus."

Since nothing so complete, as what is here insinuated, or proposed, has yet appeared in the republic of letters; your Lordship may perhaps, on some future occasion, throw such light on this important subject, as may serve the great cause of *revealed* Truth—and shew, with a *more consummate* degree of accuracy *than has hitherto* been done, the exac

line of distinction, where *Reason* may be said to end, and *Faith* to begin its operations, in divine science. In the mean time, we flatter ourselves you will condescend to take this little Treatise into your protection and patronage.

Your Lordship is not addressed, in these lines, with the contemptible voice of adulation—of ecclesiastical bigotry—or of ignorant superstition. We address you, as one of the Fathers of our Church—whose *primary* object is, not its emoluments, nor its dignities, nor its political consequence in the civil constitution, but the preservation of its fundamental truths—the perpetuity of its discipline—and the religious character of its members. As such, we venerate your office—we admire your intellectual powers—we respect your person—and we pray for the blessing of Heaven upon your indefatigable exertions for its honor and success.

C. D.
D. P. T. H.
W. J. J. C.
E. H. R. E.

THE

NATURE, EXTENT, AND PROVINCE OF REASON.

CHAP. I.

Inquiring, whether there be any thing in the *nature* and *condition* of man, to *oblige* him to think, that he is not to admit of any doctrines or institutions, as revealed from God, but such, as his own Reason can prove to be necessary from the nature of things.

I BEGIN with inquiring, what there is to *oblige* a man to hold this opinion; because, if there be not some strong and plain proof arising from the *nature* and *condition* of man, to *oblige* him thus to abide by the sole light of his own Reason; it may be so far from being a duty, which he owes to God, that it may be reckoned amongst his most criminal presumptions. And the pleading for this authority of his own Reason, may have the guilt of pleading for his greatest vanity. And if *spiritual pride be the worst sort of pride*, a confident reliance upon our own Reason, as having a right to determine all matters between God and man,

If it should prove to be a *groundless pretension*, bids fair to be reckoned the highest instance of the *worst* kind of the worst of sins.

Every other instance of vanity, every degree of personal pride, and self-esteem, may be a pardonable weakness in comparison of this. For, how small is that pride, which only makes us prefer our personal beauty or merit to that of our fellow-creatures, when compared with a self-confiding Reason, which is too haughty to adore any thing in the divine counsels, which it cannot fully comprehend; or to submit to any directions from God, but such as its own wisdom could prescribe, or approve? Thus much is certain, that there can be no *Medium* in this matter. The claiming this authority to our own Reason, must either be a very great duty, or amongst the greatest of sins.

If it be a *sin*, to admit of any *secrets* in divine providence—If it be a *crime*, to ascribe wisdom and goodness to God in things we cannot comprehend—If it be a *baseness* and *meanness* of spirit, to believe that God can teach us *better* or *more* than we can teach ourselves—If it be a *shameful apostasy* from the dignity of our nature, to be humble in the hands of God, to submit to any *mysterious* providence over us, [illegible] with any other methods of homage

and *adoration* of him, than such as we could of ourselves contrive and justify, then it is certainly a great duty to assert and maintain this authority of our own Reason.

On the other hand; If the profoundest Humility towards *God*, be the highest instance of piety—If every thing within us and without us, if every thing we know of God, every thing we know of ourselves, preach humility to us, as the foundation of every virtue, as the life and soul of all holiness—If *sin* had its beginning from *pride*, and *hell* be the effect of it; if *devils* are what they are through spiritual pride and self-conceit, then, we have great reason to believe, that the claiming this authority to our Reason, in opposition to the revealed wisdom of God, is not a frailty of *flesh* and *blood*, but that same spiritual pride, which turned *Angels* into *apostate* Spirits.

Since therefore this appealing to our own Reason, as the absolutely *perfect measure and rule* of all that ought to pass between God and man, has an *appearance* of a pride of the *worst* kind, and such as unites us both in temper and conduct with the fallen spirits of the kingdom of darkness, it highly concerns every pleader *on that side*, to consider what grounds he proceeds upon; and to ask himself, what there is

in the *state* and *condition* of human nature, to oblige him to think that nothing can be *divine*, or *holy*, or *necessary*, in religion, but what *human* Reason dictates.

I hope the reader will think this a fair state of the case, and that all the light we can have in this matter, must arise from a thorough consideration of the *state* and *condition* of man in this world. If, without Revelation, he be free from mysteries as a *moral* and *religious* agent, then he has some plea from his *state* and *condition* to reject *revealed* mysteries.

But if, in a state of natural religion, and mere morality, he cannot acknowledge a divine providence, or worship and adore God without *as much* implicit faith, and humble submission of his Reason, as any revealed mysteries require; then, his *state* and *condition* in the world will condemn his refusal of any revelation sufficiently attested to come from God.

Had mankind continued in a state of *perfect innocence*, without ever failing in their duty either to God or man, yet even in such a state, they could never have known what God would, or would not reveal to them, but by some express revelation from him. And, as God might [illegible] *raise* them to some higher, and unknown degree *of* perfection; so he might raise

them to it by the revelation of such things as their own Reason, though innocent and uncorrupt, could not have discovered.

But if man, in a state of *innocence*, could have no pretence to set himself against divine Revelation; and make his own Reason the *final judge* of what God could, or could not reveal to him; much less has he any pretence for so doing in his present state of *sin*, *ignorance*, and *misery*. His *nature* and *condition* are so far from furnishing him with reasons against Revelation, against any *supernatural* help from God, that they seem to be inconsolable without it; and every circumstance of his life prepares him to hope for terms of *mercy* and deliverance from his present guilt and misery, not according to *schemes* of his *own* contrivance, not from his *own knowledge* of the *nature*, and *reason*, and *fitness* of things, but from some *incomprehensible depth* of divine Goodness.

For, if sin, and misery, and ignorance, cannot convince us of our own weakness, cannot prepare us to accept of *any methods* of *atoning* for our guilt, but such as our own disordered Reason can suggest, we are not far from the hardened state of those miserable spirits, that make *war* against God.

For, to insist upon the *prerogative* of our own nature, as qualifying us to make our own peace with God, and to reject the *Atonement* which he has provided for us, because we esteem it more fit and reasonable, that our *own Repentance* should be sufficient without it, is the same height of *pride* and *impiety*, as to affirm that we have no need of any repentance at all.

For as mankind, if they had continued in a state of *Innocence*, could not have known how their innocence was to be rewarded, or what changes of state God intended them for, but as Revelation had discovered these things unto them: so, after they were *fallen* into a state of guilt and sin, they could never know what *effects* it was to have upon them; what *misery* it would expose them to; or *when*, or *how*, or *whether* they were ever to be delivered from it, and made as happy as if they had *never* sinned: these are things, that nothing but a Revelation from God could teach them.

So that, for a sinner to pretend to appoint the *atonement* for his own Sins, or to think himself able to tell what it *ought* to be, or what *effect* it must have with God, is as foolish and vain a *presumption*, as if man in *innocence* shou[ld] *have pretended* to appoint his own meth[od] *being changed into a Cherub.*

The Writers against Revelation, appeal to the *Reason* and *Nature* of things, as *infallibly* discovering every thing that a Revelation from God can teach us.

If the relations, say they, between things, and the fitness resulting from thence, be not the sole Rule of God's actions, must not God be an arbitrary Being? But if God only commands what the nature of things shew to be fit, 'tis scarce possible that men should mistake their duty; since a Mind that is attentive, can as easily distinguish fit from unfit, as the Eye can beauty from deformity.

It is granted, that there is a fitness and unfitness of actions founded in the nature of things, and resulting from the relations that persons and things bear to one another. It is also granted, that the reasonableness of most of the duties of children to their parents, of parents to their children, and of men to men, is very apparent, from the relation they bear to one another; and that several of the duties which we owe to God, plainly appear to us, as soon as we acknowledge the relation that is between God and us.

But when all this is granted, this *whole argument* proves directly the contrary to that *which it is* intended to prove.

I readily grant, that the Nature, Reason, and Relations of things and persons, and the fitness of actions resulting from thence, is the *sole Rule* of God's actions. And I appeal to this one common and confessed principle, as a sufficient proof that a man cannot thus abide by the *sole Light* of his own reason, without contradicting the Nature and Reason of things, and denying this to be the *sole Rule* of God's actions.

For, if the *fitness* of actions be founded in the *nature* of things and persons, and this fitness be the *sole Rule* of God's actions, it is certain that the Rule by which he acts, must in many instances be *entirely inconceivable* by us, so as not to be known *at all*, and in no instances *fully* known, or *perfectly* comprehended.

For, if God be to act according to a *fitness founded* in the *nature* of things, and nothing can be fit for him to do, but what has its fitness founded in his own *divinely perfect* and *incomprehensible* nature, must he not necessarily act by a Rule *above* all human comprehension? This argument supposes that he cannot do what is *fit* for him to do, unless what he does has its *fitness* founded in his *own nature;* but it govern his actions by his own

nature, he must act by a *Rule* that is just as *incomprehensible* to us *as* his own nature.

And we can be no farther *competent Judges* of the *fitness* of the conduct of God, than we are competent judges of the divine nature; and can no more tell what is, or is not *infinitely wise* in God, than we can raise ourselves to a *state* of infinite wisdom.

So that, if the *fitness* of actions be founded in the *particular nature* of things and persons, and the fitness of God's actions must arise from that which is *particular* to his nature, then we have, from this argument, the *utmost certainty* that the *Rule* or *Reasons* of God's actions must in many cases be entirely inconceivable by us, and in no cases perfectly and fully apprehended; and for this very reason, because he is not an *arbitrary Being*, that acts by *mere Will*, but is governed in every thing he does, by the reason and nature of things. For, if he be not arbitrary, but acts according to the nature of things, then he must act according to his *own nature*. But if his own Nature must be the *Reason*, *Rule*, and *Measure* of his actions; if they be only fit and reasonable, because they are according to this Rule *and Reason*, then it necessarily follows, that the fitness of many of God's actions must be

incomprehensible to us, *merely* for this reason, because they have their *proper fitness;* such a fitness as is founded in *the divine Nature.*

For, supposing God to be an arbitrary Being, there would then be a bare possibility of our comprehending the fitness of every thing he required of us. For, as he might act by *mere Will*, so he might choose to act according to our nature, and suitable to our comprehensions, and not according to his own nature, and infinite perfections.

But, supposing God not to be an *arbitrary Being*, but to act constantly, as the perfections of his own nature make it *fit* and *reasonable* for him to act, then, there is an utter impossibility of our comprehending the reasonableness and fitness of many of his actions.

For instance; look at the *reason* of things, and the *fitness* of actions, and tell me how they moved God to create mankind in the state and condition they are in. Nothing is more above the Reason of men, than to explain the reasonableness and infinite wisdom of God's Providence in creating man of such a *form* and *condition*, to go through *such* a state of things as human [illegible] has shewn itself to be. ☞ No revealed [illegible]ies can more exceed the Comprehen- man, than the state of human life itself.

Shew me according to what *fitness*, founded in the *nature* of things, God's infinite wisdom was determined to form you in such a manner, bring you into such a world; and suffer and preserve *such a state* of things, as human life is; and then, you may have some pretence to believe no revealed doctrines, but such as your own Reason can deduce from the nature of things, and the fitness of actions.

But, whilst our own *form*, whilst *Creation* and *Providence* are depths, which you cannot thus look into, it is strangely absurd to pretend, that God cannot reveal any thing to you as a matter of religion, except your own Reason can shew its foundation in the nature and reason of things.

For does not your own *make*, and *constitution*, the reasonableness of God's providence, and the *fitness* of the State of human life, as much concern you, as any *revealed* doctrines? Is it not as *unfit* for God to create man in such a *state*, subject to such a *course* of providence, as he cannot *prove* to be founded in the *fitness* and *reasonableness* of things; as to reveal to him such truths, or methods of salvation, as he cannot by any arguments of his own prove to be necessary?

Revelation, you say, is on your account, and therefore you ought to see the *reasonableness* and *fitness* of it.—And do not you also say, that God has made you for your *own sake*? ought you not therefore to know the reasonableness and fitness of God's forming you as you are?—Do not you say, that providence is for the *sake* of Man? is it not therefore fit and reasonable, in the nature of things, that there should be no *mysteries* or *secrets* in providence, but that man should so see its methods, as to be able to prove all its steps to be constantly fit and reasonable?

Do not you say, that the *world* is for the *sake* of man; is it not therefore fit and reasonable that man should see, that the *past* and *present* state of the world has been such as the reason and fitness of things required it should be?

Now, if the *imperfect* state of human nature, the *miseries* and *calamities* of this life, the *diseases* and mortality of human bodies, the *methods* of God's continual providence in governing human affairs, be things that as much concern us, and as nearly relate to us, as any methods of revealed religion; and if these be things that we cannot examine or explain, according to any *fitness* or *unfitness* founded in the nature of things, but must believe a great

deal more of the infinite wisdom of God, than we can so explain; have we any reason to think, that God cannot, or ought not to raise us out of this unhappy state of things, help us to an higher order of life, and exalt us to a nearer enjoyment of himself, by any means, but such as our own poor Reason can grope out of the nature and fitness of things?

Now *why is it*, that all is thus mysterious and unmeasurable by human Reason, in these matters so nearly concerning human nature? It is because God is not an *arbitrary Being*, but does that, which the *incomprehensible Perfections* of his own nature, make it *fit* and *reasonable* for him to do. Do but grant, that nothing can be *fit* for God to do, but what is, *according* to his own *infinite perfections;* let but this be the *Rule* of his actions, and then you have the *fullest* proof, that the fitness of his actions must be *above* our comprehension, who can only judge of a *fitness* according to our *own perfections;* and then we must be surrounded with mystery, for this very reason, because God acts according to a *certain Rule*, *his own Nature.*

Again: What is the *Nature* of a human Soul; upon what *terms*, and in what manner it is *united* to the body; how far it is *different*

from it; how far it is *subject* to it; what powers and faculties it *derives* from it, are things, wherein the *Wisdom* and *Goodness* of God, and the *Happiness* of man are deeply concerned. Is it not necessary that these things should have their foundation in the *reason* and *fitness* of things? and yet, who can shew that this *state* of soul and body *is* founded in the reason and fitness of things!

Again: The *Origin* of the soul, at what time it enters into the body, whether it be *immediately* created at its entrance into the body, or comes out of a *pre-existent state*, are things that cannot be known from any fitness or reasonableness founded in the nature of things; and yet it is as necessary to believe this is done according to *certain reasons* of wisdom and goodness, as to believe there is a God.

Now, who can say that it is the same thing, whether human souls are created *immediately* for human bodies, or whether they come into them out of some *pre-existent state?* For aught we know, one of these ways may be exceeding *fit* and *wise*, and the other as entirely *unjust* and *unreasonable;* and yet, when Reason examines either of these ways, it finds itself *equally perplexed* with difficulties, and knows *which to choose:* but if souls be immaterial

(as all philosophy now proves) it must be one of them.

And perhaps, the reason why God has revealed so little of these matters in holy Scripture itself, is, because any more particular revelation of them, would but have perplexed us with greater difficulties, as not having capacities or ideas to *comprehend* such things. For, as all our natural knowledge is confined to ideas borrowed from *experience*, and the use of our *senses* about *human things*; as Revelation can only teach us things that have some likeness to what we already know; as our notions of equity and justice are very limited, and confined to certain actions between man man; so, if God had revealed to us more particularly, the *origin* of our souls, and the *reason* of their state in human bodies, we might perhaps have been exposed to greater difficulties by such knowledge, and been less able to vindicate the justice and goodness of God, than we are by our present ignorance.

Again; the origin of *Sin* and *Evil*, or how it entered into the world consistently with the infinite wisdom of God, is a mystery of *natural religion*, which Reason cannot unfold. For, *who can shew* from the reason and nature of *things, that* it was *fit* and reasonable, for the

Providence of God to suffer sin and evil to enter, and continue in the world as they have? Here therefore, the Man of natural religion must drop his method of reasoning from the nature and fitness of things; and that, in an article of the highest concern to the moral world; and be as mere a believer, as he that believes the most incomprehensible mystery of revealed religion.

Now, as there have been in the several ages of the world, some *impatient*, *restless*, and *presuming* spirits, who, because they could not, in these points, explain the justice of God's providence, have taken refuge in horrid *Atheism*; so, they made just the same *sober use* of their Reason, as our *modern unbelievers*, who, because they cannot comprehend as they would, the *fitness* and *necessity* of certain Christian doctrines, resign themselves up to a hardened *Infidelity*. For, ☞ It is just as wise and reasonable to allow of no mysteries in *Revelation*, as to allow of no mysteries or secrets in *Creation* and *Providence*.

To proceed: If the *fitness of actions be founded in the nature and relations of Beings*, then
can be fit for God to do, but so far as
or the Governor of all created beings,
on earth, or in any other part of the

universe; and he cannot act fitly towards mankind, but by acting as is fit for the Governor of all beings.

Now, what is fit for the *Governor* of *all created nature* to do, in this or that particular part of his creation, is as much above our Reason to *tell*, as it is above our power to *govern* all beings. And how *Mankind* ought to be governed, with relation to the whole creation, of which they are so small a part, is a matter equally above our knowledge; because we know not how they are a part of the whole, or what relation they bear to any other part, or how their state affects the whole, or any other part, any more than we know what Beings the whole consists of.

Now, there is nothing that we know with more certainty, than that God is Governor of the whole, and that Mankind are a part of the whole; and that the uniformity and harmony of divine Providence, must arise from his infinitely wise government of the whole; and therefore we have the utmost certainty, that we are *vastly incompetent* judges of the fitness or unfitness of any methods, which God uses in the government of so small a part of the universe as *mankind* are.

For, if the actions of God cannot have their *proper fitness*, unless they are according to the *incomprehensible greatness* of his *own Nature*, and according to his incomprehensible greatness, as *Lord* and *Governor* of all created nature; have we not the most undeniable certainty, that the fitness of the divine Providence over mankind, must be a secret only to be adored, but never comprehended, in this life?—

Again, if the *fitness of actions be founded in the Relations of beings to one another*, then the fitness of the actions of God's providence over mankind, must be in many instances *altogether mysterious and incomprehensible to us.*

For the *relation* which God bears to mankind, as their *all-perfect Creator* and continual *Preserver*, is a relation that we conceive as imperfectly, and know as little of, as we do of any of the divine attributes. When we compare it to that of a *Father* and his children, a *Prince* and his subjects, a *Proprietor* and his property, we have explained it in the best manner we can; but still have left it as much a *secret*, as we do the Divine nature, when we say it is *infinitely* superior to every thing that is *finite.*

We know with certainty, several *effects* of
lation; as, that it puts us under the care
ection of a wise, and just, and merci-

ful Providence, and demands from us the highest instances of humility, duty, adoration, and thanksgiving. But, what it is in its own nature, what kind of *state*, or degree of *dependency* it signifies; what it is, to exist in and by God; what it is, to see by a *light* that is his, to act by a *power* from him, to live by a *life* in him; is, what we conceive as *imperfectly*, as what it is to be in the *third heavens*, or to hear words that cannot be uttered.

But, if this relation consist in these *inconceivable* things, in a communication of *life*, *light*, and *power;* if these be enjoyed in God; and in ourselves; our own, and yet his, in a manner not to be explained by any thing that we ever heard, or saw; then, we must necessarily be poor judges of what is fit for God to require of us, because of this *relation*. It teaches us nothing, but the superficialness of our own knowledge, and the unfathomable depths of the Divine perfections.

It is because of this incomprehensible Relation between God and his creatures, that we are unavoidably ignorant of what God may justly require of us, either in a state of *Innocence* or *Sin*. For, as the fitness of actions between Beings *related*, must result from their respective *Natures*, so the incomprehensibility of the

Divine Nature, on which the Revelation between God and man is founded, makes it utterly impossible for us to say, what *kind* of *homage*, or *worship*, he may *fitly* require of man in a state of *innocence;* or what *different* worship and homage he may, or must require of men as *sinners*.

As to the obligations of moral or social duties, which have their foundation in the conveniences of this life, and the several relations we bear to one another, these are the same in the state of *Innocence* or *Sin;* and we know, that we truly act according to the Divine Will, when we act according to what these relations require of us.

But the question is, What distinct kind of *Homage*, or *Service*, or *Worship*, God may require us to render to Him, either in a state of *Innocence* or *Sin*, on account of that Relation he bears to us as an all-perfect Creator and Governor?

But this is a question, that God alone can resolve.

Human Reason cannot enter into it; it has no principle to proceed upon in it. For as the *necessity* of Divine Worship and Homage, so *the particular matter* and *manner* of it, must *have its reason in the* Divine Nature.

Sacrifice, if considered only as an *human Invention*, could not be proved to be a reasonable service. Yet, considered as a *Divine Institution*, it would be the greatest folly not to receive it as a reasonable service. For, as we could see no reason for it, if it were of human invention, so we should have the greatest reason to comply with it, because it was of Divine Appointment. Not as if the Divine Appointment altered the *nature* and *fitness* of things; but, because nothing has the *nature* and *fitness* of Divine Worship, but *because* it is of Divine Appointment.

Man, therefore, had he continued in a state of Innocence, and without Revelation, might have lived in an awful fear, and pious regard of God, and observed every duty both of moral and civil life, as an act of obedience to him. But he could have no foundation either to invent any particular *matter* or *manner* of Divine worship himself, or to reject any that was appointed by God, as *unnecessary*. It would have been ridiculous to have pleaded his innocence, as having no need of a Divine worship. For who can have greater reason, or be fitter to worship God, than innocent Beings? It *would have been* more absurd to have objected *the sufficiency* and perfection of their Re-

son; for why should men reject a *revealed method and manner* of Divine worship and service because God had given them sense and Reason of their own sufficient for the duties of social and civil life?

And as Reason, in a state of such innocence and perfection could not have any pretence to state, or appoint, the matter or manner of Divine Worship, so when the state of innocence was changed for that of sin, it then became more difficult for bare Reason to know what kind of homage, or worship, could be acceptable to God from Sinners.

For, what the *Relation* betwixt God and Sinners makes it fit and reasonable for God to require or accept of them, cannot be determined by human Reason.

This is a *new State*, and the foundation of a *new Relation;* and nothing can be fit *for God to do in it, but what has its fitness resulting from it.* We have nothing to help our conceptions of the forementioned *relative characters* of God, as our *Governor* and *Preserver*, but what we derive from our idea of human *Fathers* and *Governors.* Which idea only helps us to comprehend these *relations*, just as our idea of human power helps us to comprehend *the Omnipotence* of God. For a father,

or governor, no more represents the *true state* of God as our *Governor* and *Preserver*, than our living in our Father's *family*, represents the *true manner* of our living in God.

These Relations are both very plain, and very mysterious; they are very plain and certain, as to the *reality* of their existence; and highly mysterious and inconceivable, as to the *manner* of their existence.

That which is *plain* and *certain*, in these relative characters of God, clearly shews our obligations to every instance of *duty*, *homage*, *adoration*, *love*, and *gratitude*.

And that, which is *mysterious* and *inconceivable* in them, is a just and solid foundation of that *profound humility*, *awful reverence*, *internal piety*, and *tremendous sense* of the divine Majesty, with which devout and pious persons think of God, and assist at the *offices* and *institutions* of Religion. Which excites in them a higher zeal for doctrines and institutions of divine Revelation, than for all things human; which fills them with regard and reverence for all *things*, *places*, and *offices*, that are either by divine or human authority appointed, to assist and help their desired intercourse with God.

And, if some people, by a *long* and *strict* attention to *Reason*, *clear ideas*, the fitness and

unfitness of things, have at last arrived at a demonstrative certainty; that all these sentiments of piety and devotion are mere *bigotry*, *superstition*, and *enthusiasm;* I shall only now observe, that *youthful extravagance*, *passion*, and *debauchery*, by their own *natural tendency*, without the assistance of any other guide, seldom fail of making the same discovery. And, though it is not reckoned any reflection upon *great Wits*, when they hit upon the same thought, yet it may seem some disparagement of that *Reason* and *Philosophy*, which teaches *old men* to think and judge of the same Religion, as *passion* and *extravagance* teach the young.

To return: As there is no state in human life, that can give us a true idea of any of the forementioned relative characters of God, so this relative state of God towards sinners is still more remote, and less capable of being truly comprehended by any thing observable in the relations betwixt a *judge* and criminals, *a creditor* and his debtors, a *physician* and his patients, a *father* or *prince*, and their disobedient children and subjects.

For none of these states separately, nor all of them jointly considered, give us any just idea, *ner of the nature* and *guilt* of sin, or how

God is to deal with sinners, on the account of the relation he bears to them.

And to ask, whether God, in punishing sinners, acts as a *physician* towards patients, or as a *creditor* towards debtors, or as a *prince* towards rebels, or a *judge* over criminals, is the same weakness, as to ask, whether God, as our *continual preserver*, acts as our parents, from whom we have our *maintenance*, or as a prince, who only *protects* us. For, as the *maintenance* and *protection*, that we receive from our parents and prince, are not proper and true representations of the *nature* and *manner* of our *preservation* in God, but only the properest words that human language affords us, to speak of things not human, but divine and inconceivable in their own proper natures: so a *physician* and his patients, a *creditor* and his debtors, a *prince* and his rebels, or a *judge* over criminals, neither separately nor jointly considered, are proper and strict representations of the *reasons* and *manner* of God's proceedings with sinners, but only help us to a more proper language to speak about them, than any other states of human life.

To ask, whether *Sin* hath solely the nature of an *offence*, against a prince or a father, and so *is pardonable* by mere goodness; whether

be like an *error* in a *road* or *path*, and so is entirely at an end, when the right path is taken; whether its guilt hath the nature of a debt, and so is capable of being discharged, just as a debt is; whether it affects the soul, as a *wound* or *disease* affects the body, and so ought only to move God to act as a good physician? all these questions are as vain as to ask, Whether knowledge in God be really *thinking*, or his nature a real *substance*. For as his knowledge and nature cannot be *strictly* defined, but are capable of being signified by the terms, *thinking* and *substance*, so the nature of sin is not *strictly represented* under any of these characters, but is capable of receiving *some representation* from every one of them.

When Sin is said to be an *offence* against God, it is to teach us, that we have infinitely more reason to dread it on *God's account*, than to dread any offence against our parents, or governors.

When it is compared to a *debt*, it is to signify, that our sins make us accountable to God, not in the *same manner*, but with the same certainty, as a debtor is answerable to his creditor; *and* because it has some likeness to a debt, *which of* ourselves we are not able to pay.

When it is compared to a *wound*, or disease in the body, it is not to teach us, that it may as easily be healed as bodily wounds, but, to help us to conceive the greatness of its evil; that, as diseases bring death to the body, so sin brings a worse kind of death upon the soul.

Since therefore, the *nature* and *guilt* of sin can only so far be known, as to make it highly to be *dreaded*, but not so known as to be *fully* understood, by any thing we can compare it to—

Since the *relation* which God bears to *sinners*, can only be so known, as to make it highly reasonable to prostrate ourselves before him, in every instance of humility and penitence; but not so fully known, as to teach us how, or in what manner, God must deal with us; it plainly follows, that, if God be not an *arbitrary* Being, but acts according to a *fitness*, *resulting* from this relation, then he must, in this respect, act by a *Rule* or *Reason* known only to himself, and such as we cannot *possibly* state from the *reason* and *nature* of things.

This account is sufficient to shew us, with how little reason and regard to the nature of *things, unbelievers* object against the Atonement *for sins by* Jesus Christ.

Their first objection is, that *Repentance alone* is a *sufficient atonement* for sin. Were they to affirm, that *sinning angels* might sufficiently regain their former perfection by a *bare wish*, they would proceed as much according to their knowledge of the nature of things, as in affirming, that *sinful man* can *merit* the pardon of his sins by his *own repentance*. I say, *merit*, because they, who hold repentance to be a *sufficient title* to pardon, can be no farther certain of it, than so far as they are *certain*, that it *merits* it. And, according to this *scheme*, the *penitent*, who thinks he has repented, need not *beg* of God to have compassion upon him, but *demands* a due, which the *nature of things* gives him a right to claim.

But if the nature of things, and the fitness of actions resulting from their relations, is to be the rule of our Reason, then *Reason* must be here at a full stop, and can have no more light or knowledge to proceed upon, in stating the *nature*, the *guilt*, or proper *atonement* of sin in men than of sin in *Angels*.

For *Reason*, by consulting the *nature* and *fit-*
ngs, can no more tell us, what the
is; what *hurt* it does us; how far it
and alters our very nature; what
o, and *separation* from God, it ne-

cessarily brings upon us; or what *supernatural* means are, or are not, necessary to abolish it; our *Reason* can no more tell this, than our *senses* can tell us, what is the *inward*, and what is the *outward* light of Angels.

Ask Reason, what *effect* sin has upon the soul? and it can tell you no more, than if you had asked, what effect the *omnipresence* of God has upon the soul?

Ask Reason, and the nature of things, what is, or ought to be, the *true nature* of an atonement for sin; how far it is like *paying* a *debt*, *reconciling* a *difference*, or *healing* a *wound*, or how far it is different from them? and it can tell you no more, than if you had asked, what is the *true degree* of power that *preserves* us in existence; how far it is *like* that which at first created us, and how far it is *different* from it?

All these inquiries are, by the nature of things, made impossible to us; and we can only become *knowing* and *philosophers*, in these matters, by deserting our Reason, and giving ourselves up to *vision* and *imagination*.

And we have as much authority from the reason and nature of things, to appeal to *hunger* and *thirst*, and *sensual pleasure*, to tell us how *our souls shall* live in the beatific presence

God, as to appeal to our *Reason* and *Logic*, to demonstrate how sin is to be *atoned*, or the soul *altered*, *prepared*, and *purified*, for future happiness.

For God has no more given us our Reason, to *settle* the nature of an atonement for sin; or to find out what can, or cannot, take away its guilt, than he has given us *senses* and *appetites* to state the nature, or discover the ingredients, of future happiness.

And he, who rejects the *atonement* for sins made by the Son of God, as *needless*, because he cannot prove it to be *necessary*, is as extravagant, as he that should deny that God created him by his *only Son*, because he did not *remember* it. For our Memory is as proper a faculty to tell us, whether God at first created us, and all things, by his only Son, as our *Reason* is to tell us, whether we ought to be restored to God, with, or without the mediation of Jesus Christ.

This objection, therefore, against any *supernatural* means of atoning for sin, taken from the *sufficiency* of our own Repentance, is as *clear* and *philosophical*, as that *knowledge* which is without *any ideas;* and as justly to be relied *on, as that conclusion* which has no *premises*.

But, there are two more objections urged against the atonement for sin, made by Jesus Christ. *First*, as it is an *human sacrifice*, *which nature itself abhors;* and which was looked upon as the great abomination of idolatrous *pagan* worship.

The *cruelty*, *injustice*, and *impiety*, of shedding *human* blood in the sacrifices of the *pagan* religion, is fully granted: but *Reason* cannot thence bring the smallest objection against the sacrifice of Christ, as it was *human*.

For how can Reason be more disregarded, than in such an argument as this? The *Pagans* were unjust, cruel, and impious, in offering human blood to their false gods, therefore the true God cannot receive any *human* sacrifice for sin, or allow any persons to die, as a punishment for sin.

For, if no human sacrifice can be fit for God to receive, because human sacrifices, as parts of *pagan* worship, were unjust and impious; then it would follow, that the *mortality*, to which all mankind are appointed by God, must have the *same cruelty* and *injustice* in it. Now, that *death* is a punishment for sin, and that all mankind are by death offered as a sacrifice for sin, *is not only* a doctrine of revealed Religion, but *the plain* dictate of Reason. For, though it

Revelation alone that can teach us, how God threatened death as the punishment of a particular sin, yet Reason must be obliged to acknowledge, that men die, because they are sinners. But if men die, because they are sinners, and Reason itself must receive this, as the most justifiable cause of Death; then Reason must allow, that the death of all mankind is appointed by the true God, as a *sacrifice* for sin. But, if Reason must acknowledge the death of all mankind as a sacrifice for sin, then it can have no just objection against the sacrifice of Christ, *because* it was *human*.

Revelation, therefore, teaches nothing more hard to be believed on this point, than Reason teaches. For, if it be just and fit in God, to *appoint* and *devote* all men to death, as the proper *punishment* of their sins; how can it be proved to be unjust and unfit in God, to receive the death of Jesus Christ, for the same ends?

I do not pretend to prove the *fitness* and *reasonableness* of God's procedure in the *mortality* of mankind; Revelation is not under any necessity of proving this; because it is no difficulty that arises from Revelation, but equally belongs *to natural religion;* and both of them must acwledge *it to be* fit and reasonable; not be. *it can be proved* to be so from the nature

of things, but is to be believed to be so, by faith and piety.

But, if the necessary faith and piety of natural religion, will not suffer us to think it *inconsistent* with the justice and goodness of God, to appoint all mankind victims to death on the account of sin, then *Reason*, or *natural Religion*, can have no objection against the sacrifice of Christ, as it is an *human sacrifice*.

And all that *Revelation* adds to *natural religion*, on the point of *human* sacrifices, is only this; the knowledge of *one*, that gives *merit* *effect*, and *sanctification*, to all the rest.

Secondly, It is objected, that the Atonement made by Jesus Christ, represents God as punishing the *innocent*, and acquitting the *guilty* or, as punishing the innocent *instead* of the guilty.

But this proceeds all upon mistake: for the atonement made by Jesus Christ, though it procures pardon for the guilty, yet it does not acquit them, or excuse them from any punishment, or suffering for sin, which *Reason* could impose upon them. Natural religion calls men to repentance for their sins: the atonement made by Jesus Christ, does not acquit them *from it, or* pardon them without it, but calls *them to a severer* repentance, a higher s

ıment and penance, than natural religion,
prescribes. So that *Reason* cannot ac-
this atonement, of *acquitting* the guilty;
it brings them under a necessity of doing
, and performing a *severer* repentance
Reason, alone, can impose upon them.
God, therefore, does not, by this proceeding,
is unreasonably said, shew his *dislike* of the
nocent, and his *approbation* of the *wicked*.
For how can God be thought to punish our
blessed Savior out of *dislike*, if his sufferings
be represented of such infinite merit with him?
Or, how can he shew thereby his *approbation*
of the guilty, whose repentance is not *accepta-*
ble to him, till recommended by the infinite
merits of Jesus Christ?

Reason therefore has nothing that it c
justly object against the atonement made
our blessed Lord, either as it was an *hun*
sacrifice, or as *freeing* the *guilty*, and pun
ing the innocent in their stead; because
very Sacrifice calls people to a *higher sta*
suffering and punishment for sin, than *R*
alone, could oblige them to undergo.

As to the fitness and reasonableness
blessed Lord's sufferings, as he was C
n; and the nature and *degree* of the
son can no more enter into this

disprove any thing about it, than it can enter into the state of the whole creation, and shew, how it could, or could not, be in the whole, better than it is.

For you may as well ask any of your *senses*, as ask your *Reason* this principal question,—*Whether any supernatural mean be necessary for the atonement of the sins of mankind?* Or, supposing it necessary, whether the *mediation*, *death*, and *intercession* of Jesus Christ, as God and man, be that true supernatural mean?

For, as the fitness or unfitness of any *supernatural* means, for the atonement of sin, must result from the *incomprehensible relation* God bears to sinners; as it must have such *necessity*, *worth*, and *dignity*, as this relation *requires*, and because it requires it; it necessarily follows, that, if God act according to *this relation*, the *fitness* of his actions cannot be according to *our comprehension*.

Again. Supposing some *supernatural means* to be necessary, for destroying the guilt and power of sin; or that the *mediation*, *sufferings*, and *intercession*, of the Son of God incarnate, be the true supernatural means, it necessarily follows, that a Revelation of such, or any other *supernatural* means, cannot possibly be made *obvious to our* Reason and Senses, as the things

of human life, or the transactions amongst men are; but can only be so revealed, as to become just occasions of our *faith*, *humility*, *adoration*, and *pious resignation*, to the Divine wisdom and goodness.

For, to say that such a thing is *supernatural*, is only saying, that it is something, which, by the *necessary state* of our own nature, we are as incapable of knowing, as we are incapable of seeing *spirits*.

If therefore supernatural and divine things be ever revealed to us, their *nature* cannot possibly be revealed to us; that is, they cannot be revealed to us, as they are in their *own nature:* for if they could, such things would not be *supernatural*, but such as were suited to our capacities.

If an *Angel* could appear to us, as it is in its own nature, then we should be *naturally* capable of seeing angels; but, because our nature is not *capable* of such a sight, and angels are, as to us, *supernatural* objects; therefore, when *angels* appear to men, they must appear in some *human* or *corporeal* form, that their appearance may be suited to our capacities.

It is just thus, when any *supernatural* or *divine matter is* revealed by God: it can no *re possibly be* revealed to us, as it is in it

own nature, than an *Angel* can appear to us, or make itself visible by us, as it is in its own nature; but such supernatural matter can only be revealed to us, by being represented to us by something that we already *naturally* know.

Thus, Revelation teaches us this *supernatural* matter that Jesus Christ is making *perpetual intercession for us in heaven*. For Christ's *real state*, or *manner* of existence with God in heaven, in regard to his Church, cannot, as it is in its *own nature*, be described to us; it is in this respect *ineffable*, and *incomprehensible*. And therefore, this high and inconceivable manner of Christ's existence with God in heaven, in regard to his church, is revealed to us under an idea, which gives us the truest representation of it, that we are capable of; *viz.* the idea of a *perpetual intercession* for his church.

But, if any one should thence infer, that the Son of God must therefore either be always upon his knees in acts of *mental* or *vocal* prayer; or *prostrate* in some humble form of a supplicant, he would make a very weak inference.

Because this revealed idea of Christ, as a perpetual intercessor in heaven, is only a comparative representation of something that is

not be *directly* and *plainly* known, as it is in its own nature; and only teaches us, how to believe something, though imperfectly, yet *truly* and *usefully* of an *incomprehensible* matter.

Just as our own ideas of *wisdom* and *goodness* do not teach us what the Divine wisdom and goodness are in their *own natures;* but only help us to believe something *truly* and *usefully* of those perfections of God, which are in themselves inconceivable by us.

But then, there is no inferring any thing from these ideas, by which divine and supernatural things are represented to us, only the *truth* and *certainty* of that *likeness* under which they are represented.

Thus, from our own idea of goodness in ourselves, we can infer nothing concerning goodness, as it is a perfection inherent in God, but only this, that there certainly is in God some *inconceivable, infinite* perfection, *truly answerable* to that which we call goodness in ourselves, though as *infinitely* different from it, as *Omnipotence* is infinitely different from all that we *naturally* know of *power.*

But then, we can proceed no farther than to *he truth and certainty* of this *likeness;* we *not by any farther* considerations of the na-

ture and *manner* of goodness, as it is in ourselves, infer any thing farther, as to the *nature* and *manner* of the *Divine goodness*. This is as impossible, as to state the real nature and manner of *Omnipotence*, by considering the *particulars* of *human power*.

In like manner, our revealed idea of Jesus Christ as an *Intercessor* for us in heaven, gives us the utmost certainty that he is in heaven for our benefit, in a manner *truly* and *fully* answerable to that of a *powerful Intercessor*. But if, from considering our own ideas of *human Intercessors*, we should thence pretend to infer the *real supernatural* manner of Christ's existence in heaven, we should fall into the same absurdity, as if we undertook to represent the *true* nature of *Omnipotence*, by considering what we knew of the *nature* and *manner* of human power.

Again: When it is revealed to us, that the blessed Jesus is the one *Mediator* between God and man; that, he is the *Atonement*, the *Propitiation*, and *Satisfaction* for our sins: these expressions only teach us *as much* about so great a mystery, as *human* language can represent. But, they do not teach us the real or *perfect* nature of Christ's state between God and sinners. For that, being a divine and

supernatural matter, cannot be revealed to us as it is in its own *Nature*, any more than the *essence* of God can be made *visible* to our eyes.

For these expressions teach us thus much [illegible] there is in the *state* of [illegible] between God and sinners, something [illegible] unspeakably beneficial to us; [illegible] to all that we mean by *[illegible]*, *reconciliation*, and *satisfaction*.

[illegible] *eternal manner*, of this [illegible] as it is in its *own* [illegible] *visible* by us, yet this does [illegible] knowledge of the *truth* and *certainty* [illegible] any more than the *incomprehensibleness* of the Divine nature lessens our *certainty* [illegible] existence.

[illegible] idea of God, though consisting [illegible] perfections, helps us to a [illegible] knowledge of the Divine nature, though all mysterious, is yet the [illegible] foundation of all piety; so our idea of [illegible] as our *mediator* and *atonement*, [illegible] incomprehensible in itself, as to [illegible] helps us to a *certain* and [illegible] of Christ, as our *mediator* and [illegible] though full of mystery, is yet

full of motives to the highest degrees of piety, devotion, love, and gratitude unto God.

All objections therefore, raised from difficulties about the nature of *atonements*, *propitiations*, and *satisfactions*, as these words are used to signify in human life, and common language, are vain, and entirely groundless.

For all these objections proceed upon this supposition, that *atonement*, or *satisfaction*, when attributed to Jesus Christ, signify neither *more* nor *less*, than when they are used as terms in *human laws*, or in *civil* life.—Take away this supposition, and all objections are entirely removed with it:

Thus, it is thought an unanswerable difficulty in the present case, How *sins freely pardoned, could want any expiation?* Or how, after a full *equivalent paid, and adequate satisfaction given, all could be mercy and pure forgiveness?*

And yet all this difficulty is founded upon this absurd supposition, that atonement and satisfaction, when attributed to Jesus Christ, signify neither more nor less, than atonements and satisfactions, when spoken of in human laws, and human life.

Which is full as absurd, as to suppose, that *power* and *life*, when attributed to God, signify *neither* more nor less, than when they are

spoken of men: for there is no reason why we should think there is any thing mysterious and incomprehensible in *power* and *life*, when attributed to God; but what is the same reason for our thinking, that *atonement* and *satisfaction*, when ascribed to the Son of God, must be mysterious and incomprehensible.

To return: I have granted this great principle, *That the relations of things and persons, and the fitness resulting from thence, are the sole Rule of God's actions:* and I have granted it upon this supposition, that it must thence follow, that God must act according to his *own Nature;* and therefore nothing could be fit for God to do, or worthy of him, but what had the reason of its fitness in his own nature: and if so, then the *Rule* of his actions could not fall within *our Comprehension.* And consequently, *Reason alone*, could not be a *competent judge* of God's proceedings; or say, what God might, or might not, require of us.

But though I have thus far, and for this reason, granted the *Nature* and *Relations* of things and beings, to be *the Rule* of God's actions, because that plainly supposes, that therefore his *own Nature* must be the rule of his actions; yet since our modern opposers of revealed doctrines of religion, hold it in another sense, and

mean by it, I know not what *eternal, immutable* reasons and relations of things, *independent* of any Being, and which are a *common rule and law of God and man*, I entirely declare against this, as an erroneous and groundless opinion.

Thus, when an objector says, *If the relations between things, and the fitness resulting from thence, be not the sole rule of God's actions, must he not be an arbitrary being?* as he here means some *eternal, immutable relations, independent* of God; so, to suppose, that God cannot be a *wise* and *good* being, unless such eternal, independent relations be the *sole rule* of his actions, is as erroneous, as to affirm, that God cannot be *omniscient*, unless *mathematical demonstrations* be his *sole manner* of knowing all things. And it is just as reasonable to fix God's knowledge *solely* in mathematical demonstrations, that we may thence be assured of his *infallible knowledge*, as to make I know not what independent relations of things, the *sole rule* of his actions; that we may thence be assured, he is not an *arbitrary*, but a wise and good Being.

And we have as strong reasons to believe God to be, in the highest degree, *wise* and *good*, without knowing on *what* his wisdom and goodness are founded; as we have to believe *him to be omniscient*, and eternal, without know-

ing on *what* his *omniscience* is founded; or to *what* his *eternity* is owing. And we have the same reason to hold it a vain and fruitless inquiry, to ask, what *obliges* God to be *Wise* and *Good*, as to ask what obliges him to be *Omniscient*, or *Eternal*.

And, as it would be absurd to ascribe the *Existence* of God to *any Cause*, or found it upon any *independent Relations* of things, so it is the same absurdity to ascribe the infinite wisdom and goodness of God to *any cause*, or found them upon any independent relations of things.

Nor do we any more *lose* the notion, or *lessen* the certainty of the Divine Wisdom and Goodness, because we cannot say on *what* they are founded, or to *what* they are to be ascribed, than we *lose* the notion of God, or render his existence *uncertain*, because it cannot be founded on any thing, or ascribed to any cause.

And as, in our account of the existence of things, we are obliged to have recourse to a Being, whose existence must not be ascribed to *any Cause*, because every thing cannot have a cause, no more than every thing can be created; so, in our account of *Wisdom* and *Goodness*, there is the same necessity of having recourse to an infinite Wisdom and Goodness, *never began* to be, and that is as different

as to its *reason* and *manner* of existence, from all other wisdom and goodness, which have a beginning, as the *existence* of God is *different* from the existence of the creatures.

But, if it be necessary to hold, that there is an infinite wisdom and goodness that *never began* to be, then it is as necessary to affirm, that such wisdom and goodness can no more be *founded* upon the *relations* of things, than the *unbeginning existence* of God can be *founded* upon the existence of things. And to seek for any *reasons* of a wisdom and goodness, that could not begin to be, but were always in the *same infinite* state, is like seeking the cause of that, which can have no cause, or asking, *what* it is that *contains* infinity.

But, to derive the wisdom and goodness of God from the directions he receives from the *Relations* of things, because our wisdom and goodness are directed by them, is as weak and vain, as to found his *knowledge* upon *ideas*, because our knowledge is *necessarily* founded upon them.

When therefore it is said, *Infinite wisdom can have no commands, but what are founded on the unalterable reason of things*; it might as *justly have* been said, an *infinite* Creator can

have no *power* of creating, but what is founded on the *unalterable nature* of creatures.

For the *reason* of things, is just as unalterable, as the *nature* of creatures. And if the reasons and relations of things be nothing else but their *manner* of existence, or the *state* of their nature, certainly the relations of things must have the same *beginning*, and the same *alterable* or unalterable nature, as the things from whence they flow. Unless it can be said, that a thing may exist in *such a manner*, though it does not exist at all.

Nothing is more certain, than that the relations of things are only the *particular state* of their nature, or *manner* of existence; there can therefore no eternal and unalterable relations exist, but of things that eternally and unalterably exist. Unless a thing may be said to exist eternally and unalterably in such a particular *state* of nature, or *manner* of existence, and yet have no eternal existence.

When therefore it is said again, *The Will of God is always determined by the nature and reason of things*—It is the same as if it were said, the *Omnipotence* of God is always determined

ture of causes and *effects*. For, as all *effects* are what they are, and owe *to the* omnipotence of God, so the

relations of things are what they are, and owe their nature to the Wisdom and Will of God.

Nor does this dependance of the relations of things on the *Will* of God destroy the nature of relations, or make them doubtful, any more than the existence of things depending on the *Power* of God, destroys the certainty of their existence, or renders it doubtful. For as God cannot make things to exist, and not to exist at the same time, though their existence depends upon his *Power*, so neither can he make things to have such relations, and yet not to have such relations at the same time, though their relations depend upon his *Will*.

So that, the ascribing the relations of things to the Will of God, from whence alone they can proceed, brings no uncertainty to those duties or rules of life, which flow from such relations, but leaves the state of nature, with all its relations, and the duties which flow from them, in the greatest certainty, so long as nature itself is continued; and, when that either *ceases entirely*, or is only *altered*, it is not to be wondered at; if all its relations cease, or are altered with it.

But *Dare any one say, that God's Laws are not founded on the eternal* reason of things?

I dare say it, with the same assurance, as that his *Existence* is not founded on the *eternal existence* of things. And, it is the same extravagance to say, that God's laws are founded on the *eternal reasons* of things, as to say, that his *power* is founded on the *eternal capacities* of things. For the *capacities* of things have just the same *solidity* and *eternity*, as the relations of things have; and are just such *independent realities* as they are: and are just the same *proper materials* to found the omnipotence of God upon, as the relations of things are to found his infinite wisdom upon.

And, as we can say, that the *Omnipotence* of God, in preserving and supporting the creation, will certainly act *suitably* to its self, and *consistent* with that omnipotence which first made things be what they are, and put nature into such a state of causes and effects as it is in; so we can say, that the *infinite Wisdom* of God, in giving laws to the world, will act *suitably* to its self, and *consistent* with that wisdom which at first made the *nature* and *relations* of the rational world be what they are.

But then, as the *Omnipotence* of God, though *it acts suitably* to the laws and state of the creation, *and the* nature of causes and effects, which *it first ordained, cannot* be said to be found-

ed upon the nature of causes and effects; because neither causes nor effects have any nature, but what they *owe* to omnipotence; so, the infinite *Wisdom* of God, though in giving laws to the world, it acts *suitably* to the natures and relation of rational beings, yet cannot be said to be *founded* upon such relations; because such relations are the *effects* of the Divine wisdom, and owe their existence to it.

And the *reason* or *relations* of things shew God's *antecedent* wisdom, and are effects of it, just as the nature of *causes* and *effects* shew his *antecedent* power, and are the effects of it. And as he is infinitely powerful, but not from the *nature* of causes and effects; so he is infinitely wise, but not from the *reason* and *nature* of things.

Again, if God be *infinite* wisdom, then his wisdom cannot be founded on the relations of things; unless things *finite* and relations that began to be, can be the foundation of that wisdom which is infinite, and could not begin to be.

And to ask, What the infinite wisdom of God can be founded upon, if it be not founded upon the *natures* and *relations* of things, is the *same absurdity* as to ask, how God's wisdom *could be without* a beginning, if we cannot tell

how it *began?* For if his wisdom be infinite, it can no more be founded upon any thing, or have any reason of its existence, than it can have any thing before it.

Therefore to ask, *what* it is founded upon, when it can have no foundation upon *any thing*, is asking, what an *independent* Being is dependent upon, or *how* that began, which could have *no* beginning?

And to ask the reason or foundation of *any one* of the divine attributes, is the same as asking the reason or foundation of them all. And to seek for the reason or foundation of *all* the divine attributes, is seeking for the *Cause* of God's existence.

And as we do not come at God's existence till we come to the *end* of *causes*, so nothing that is divine, can be attributed to any cause.

Nor is it any more a contradiction to say, there is something whose nature is without any cause or foundation of its existence, than to say something exists without ever *beginning* to exist. For as nothing can have a beginning, but as it proceeds from some cause; so that, which can have no beginning, can have no *cause*. If therefore the divine wisdom ever *began to be infinite*, and we could know when *that beginning* was, we should have some pre-

tence to search for *that*, upon which its infinity was *founded;* but if it never could begin to be, then to seek for its reason, or foundation, is seeking for its beginning.

It may be asked, is there then no *reason* or *nature* of things? Yes; as certainly as there are things. But the nature and reason of things, considered *independently* of the divine Will, or *without* it, have no more *obligation* in them, than a *divine worship* considered independently of, and without any regard to the *existence* of God. For the *Will* of God is as absolutely necessary to found all *moral obligation* upon, as the existence of God is necessary to be the foundation of religious worship. And the fitness of *moral obligations*, without the *Will* of God, is only like the fitness of a *religious* worship without the *existence* of God.

And it is as just to say, that he destroys the *reason* of religion and piety, who founds it upon the nature and existence of God, as to say, he saps the foundation of moral obligations, who founds them upon the Will of God. And as religion cannot be justly or solidly defended, but by shewing its connexion with, and dependence upon, God's existence; so neither can *moral obligations* be asserted with strength

and reason, but by shewing them to be the Will of God.

It may again be asked, Can God make that fit in *its self*, which is in *its self absolutely* unfit to be done?

This question consists of improper terms. For God's will no more makes actions to be fit *in themselves*, than it makes *things* to exist *in*, or *of themselves*. No things, nor any actions, have any *absolute* fitness, and in *themselves*.

A *gift*, a *blow*, the making a *wound*, or *shedding* of *blood*, considered in themselves, have no *absolute* fitness, but are fit or unfit according to any variety of incidental circumstances.

When therefore God, by his Will, makes any thing fit to be done, he does not make the thing fit in *its self*, which is just in the *same state* considered in *its self*, as it was before; but, it becomes fit for the person to do it, because he can only be happy, or do that which is fit for him to do, by doing the Will of God.

For instance, the *bare eating* a fruit, considered in *its self*, is neither fit nor unfit. If a fruit be appointed by God for our food and *nourishment*, then it is as fit to eat it, as to *preserve* our lives. If a fruit be poisonous, then it is as unfit to eat it, as to commit self-

murder. If eating of a fruit be prohibited by an express order of God, then it is as unfit to eat it, as to eat our own damnation.

But in none of these instances is the eating or not eating, considered in *its self, fit* or *unfit;* but has all its fitness, or unfitness, from such circumstances, as are entirely owing to the Will of God.

Supposing, therefore, God to require a person to do something, which, according to his present circumstances, *without* that command, he ought not to do, God does not make that which is *absolutely* unfit in *itself*, fit to be done; but only adds *new circumstances* to an action, that is neither fit nor unfit, moral nor immoral in *itself*, but *because* of its circumstances.

To instance, in the case of *Abraham* required to sacrifice his son. The killing of a man is neither good nor bad, considered *absolutely* in *its self.* It was unlawful for *Abraham* to kill his son, because of the *circumstances* he was in with regard to his son. But when the divine Command was given, *Abraham* was in a *new state;* the action had *new circumstances;* and then it was as lawful for *Abraham* to kill his son, as it was lawful for God to require any man's life, either by sickness, or any other *means* he should please to appoint.

... as unlawful for *Abraham* to ...obeyed God in this extraordinary com... o have cursed God at any *ordinary* ... of providence.—

...in, it is objected, *If there be nothing right ... good or bad, antecedently and inde... of the Will of God, there can be no ..., why God should will, or command one ... rather than another.*

... is answered, *first*, That all goodness, and ... possible perfection, is as *eternal* as God, and ... *essential* to him as his existence. And to ..., that they are either *antecedent* or *conse... nt*, *dependent* or *independent* of his Will, would be equally absurd. To ask, therefore, whether there be not something right and wrong, antecedent to the Will of God, to render his Will *capable* of being right, is as absurd, as to ask for some antecedent cause of his existence, that he may be proved to exist necessarily. And to ask, how God can be good, if there be not something good independently of him, is asking how he can be infinite, if there be not something infinite independently of him. And, to seek for any other *source* or *reason* of the divine Goodness, besides the ... *ure*, is like seeking for some exter... *nd help* of the Divine omnipotence.

The goodness and wisdom, therefore, by which God is wise and good, and to which all his works of wisdom and goodness are owing, are neither *antecedent*, nor *consequent* to his Will.—

Secondly, Nothing is more certain, than that all *moral Obligations* and *Duties*, of creatures towards one another, *began* with the existence of moral creatures. This is as certain, as that all *physical relations*, and corporeal qualities and effects *began* with the existence of bodies.

As therefore nothing has the nature of a cause or effect, nothing has any quality of any kind in bodies, but what is entirely owing to matter so created and constituted by the *Will* of God; so, it is equally certain, that no actions have any *moral qualities*, but what are wholly owing to that state and nature in which they are created by the Will of God.

Moral obligations, therefore, of creatures, have the same *origin*, and the *same reason*, that natural qualities and effects have in the corporeal world, *viz. the sole Will of God.* And, as in a different state of matter, bodies would have had different qualities and effects; so, in a different state of rational beings, there would be different moral obligations; and nothing could be right or good in their behavior, but

what began then to be right and good, because they then began to exist in such a state and condition of life. And, as their state and condition could have no other cause or reason of its existence, but the sole Will of God, so the cause and reason of right and wrong, in such a state, must be equally owing to the Will of God.

The pretended *absolute independent fitnesses*, or *unfitnesses* of actions, therefore, *in themselves*, are vain abstractions, and philosophical *jargon;* serving no ends of morality: but only helping people to wrangle and dispute away that sincere obedience to God, which is their only happiness. But, to make these imaginary *absolute fitnesses* the *common Law* both of God and man, is still more extravagant. For, if the *circumstances* of actions, give them their *moral nature*, surely God must first be in *our* circumstances, before that, which is a law to us, can be the same law to him.

And, if a father may require that of a son, which his son, because of his *different state* cannot require of his brother; surely that, which God may require of us, may be as different from that, which a father may require of a son, as God is different from a father.

To say, that the *reason* of things is the same law to God as it is to us, is saying, that God is to the *same state*, with *regard* to the nature of things, as we are. For, as things are a law to us, because we are in *such* a state; if they be the *same law* to God, it must be, because God is in the same state as we are.

Again, if God be as much under a law as we are, than he is as much under *authority;* for law can no more be without authority, than without a lawgiver. And if God and we are under the *same law*, we must be under the *same authority.*

But as God cannot be under any law in common with us, his creatures, any more than he can be of the same rank or order with us; so neither can he be under any law at all, any more than he can be under any authority at all.

For that, which is the *Rule*, or *Reason* of God's actions, is no more different from his own Will, than his power is different from his Will.

And though God is not to be looked upon as an *arbitrary Being*, in the sense of those, who will not distinguish arbitrary from *humor* and *caprice;* yet, in a better and only true sense of the word, when applied to God, he must be affirmed to be an arbitrary Being, who acts only

from himself, from his *own Will*, and according to his *own pleasure*.

And we have no more reason to be afraid to be left to a God without a law, than to a God that had no beginning; or to be left to his Will and pleasure, than to be left under the protection and care of a Being, who is all love, and mercy, and goodness. For, as the existence of God, as such, necessarily implies the existence of all perfection; so the Will of God, as such, necessarily implies the *willing* every thing, that all *perfection* can will.

And as the existence of God, because it contains all perfection, cannot for that reason have any external Cause; so the Will of God, because it is all *perfection*, cannot, for that reason, have any external *Rule* or *direction*. But his own Will is Wisdom, and his Wisdom is his Will. His Goodness is arbitrary, and his Arbitrariness is goodness.

To bring God therefore into a state of moral obligation and subjection to any external *Law* or *Rule*, as we are, has all the absurdity of supposing him to be a finite, dependant, temporary, imperfect, improveable, governable Being *as we are*.——

The truth of the matter is this; Reason is

And, as the Divine *Power* has some degree of likeness to human power, yet with an *infinite* difference from it; so that perfection, which we call *Reason* in God, has some degree of likeness to reason as it is in man, yet is *infinitely* and beyond all conception different from it.

Nor can any one shew, that we enjoy reason in a *higher degree* in respect of God, than we enjoy power; or that the *manner*, or *light* o our Reason, bears any greater likeness to the light and knowledge of God, than the *manner* and *extent* of our power bears to the omnipotence of God.

And as our enjoyment of power is so limited, so imperfect, so superficial, as to be scarce sufficient to tell us, what power is, much less what omnipotence is; so ☞ our share of Reason is so small, and we enjoy it in so imperfect a manner, that we can scarce think or talk intelligibly of it, or so much as define our own faculties of reasoning.

CHAP. II.

Shewing, from the *state* and *relation* between God and man, that human Reason cannot possibly be a competent judge of the *fitness* and *reasonableness* of God's proceedings with mankind, either as to the *time*, or *matter*, or *manner*, of any external Revelation.

SINCE it has frequently been laid down as an undeniable Rule of God's actions, that he must, if he be a wise and good being, act according to the relation he stands in towards his creatures; I proceed, *upon this principle*, to prove the incapacity of *human Reason*, to judge *truly* of God's proceedings in regard to *Divine Revelation*.

For, if the fitness of actions *result from the nature and relations* of beings, then the *fitness* of God's actions, as he is an *omniscient Creator* and *Governor*, to whom every thing is *eternally foreknown*, over beings endued with *our freedom of will*, must be to us very *incomprehensible*.

We are not so much as capable of comprehending, by our own Reason, the *possibility* of *this relation*, or how the foreknowledge of God *consist with* the free agency of creatures.

We know that God foreknows all things, with the same certainty as we know there is a God. And, if *self-consciousness* be an infallible proof of our own existence, it proves, with the same certainty, the freedom of our will. And hence it is, that we have a full assurance of the consistency of God's fore-knowledge with freedom of will.

Now this *incomprehensible* relation between an *eternally fore-knowing Creator* and *Governor*, and his free creatures, is the *relation* from whence arises the *fitness* of God's providence over us. But if the *relation* itself be incomprehensible, then those actions that have their *fitness* from it, must surely be incomprehensible. Nothing can be fit for God to do, either in *Creation* or *Providence*, but what has its fitness founded in his own *Fore-knowledge* of every thing that would follow, from *every kind* of creation, and *every manner* of providence. But if nothing can be fit, but because it is according to *this fore-knowledge* of *every thing* that would follow, from *every kind* of creation, and *every manner* of providence; then we have the utmost certainty, that the *fitness* of God's actions, as a *fore-knowing Creator* and *Governor*, of free agents, must be founded upon reasons, *which we cannot possibly* know any thing of

And a *Child*, that has but just learned to speak, is as well qualified to state the fitness of the laws of *matter* and *motion*, by which the whole *vegetable* world is preserved, as the wisest of men are qualified to comprehend, or state the fitness of the methods, or proceedings, which a *fore-knowing Providence* preserves over free agents. For every reason, on which *the fitness* of such a Providence is founded, is not only *unknown* to us, but by a necessity of nature *impossible* to be known by us.

For, if the *fitness* of God's acting in this, or that manner, be founded in his *fore-knowledge* of every thing that would *happen*, from *every possible way* of acting, *then*, it is just as absolutely impossible for us to know the reasons, on which the fitness of his actions is founded, as it is impossible for us to be omniscient.

What human Reason can tell, what kind of beings it is *fit* and *reasonable* for God to create, on the account of his own *eternal Fore-knowledge?* And yet, this is as possible, as for the same reason to tell, how God ought to govern beings already created, on the account of his own eternal fore-knowledge: and yet, God can neither *create*, nor *govern* his creatures, as it *fit and reasonable* he should, unless he cre- *and* governs them in *this* or *that* manner,

on the *account* of his own fore-knowledge. And therefore, if he act *like* himself, and *worthy* of his own nature, the fitness of his proceedings must for this very reason, *because* they are fit, be vastly *above* our comprehension.

Who can tell what *different kinds* of rational creatures, distinguished by variety of natures, and faculties, it is fit and reasonable for God to create, because he *eternally foresaw* what would be the *effect* of such different creations? Who can explain the *fitness* of that vast *variety* there is amongst rational creatures of the *same species*, in their rational faculties, or shew that all their different faculties ought to be as they are? And yet, the *fitness* of this providence has its *certain reason* in the Divine fore-knowledge; and it could not be fit, but because of it.

Who can tell what *degree* of Reason rational creatures ought to enjoy, *because* they are rational; or what degrees of *new* and *revealed* knowledge it is fit and reasonable for God to give, or not give them, because they seem, or seem not to themselves to want it? are disposed, or not disposed, to receive it? For, as mankind cannot tell why it was *fit* and *reasonable* for God to create them of such a *kind*, and *degree*, as they are of; so neither can they how God ought, or ought not to add to

natural knowledge, and make them as *differently accountable* for the use of revealed rules of life, as for the use of their natural faculties.

And as the reason, why God created them of *such* a *kind*, and with *such faculties*, was because of his own fore-knowledge of the *effects* of such a creation; so, if ever he do reveal to them any *supernatural* knowledge, both *the doing it*, the *time*, and *matter*, and *manner* of it, must have its *fitness* in his own *eternal Fore-knowledge* of the effects of such a Revelation.

The reasons, therefore, on which the *fitness* of this or that Revelation, *why*, or *when*, of *what matter*, in *what manner*, and to *whom* it is to be made, must, from the nature and reason of things, be as unsearchable by us, as the reasons of *this* or *that* creation of rational beings, at such a *time*, of such a *kind*, in such a *state*.

This may help us to an easy solution of these *unreasonable* questions, which are so often proposed——

If the design of God in communicating any thing of himself to men were their happiness, would not that design have obliged him, who at all times alike desires their happiness, to have at all times alike communicated it to them? If God always act for the good *of his* creatures, *what reason can be assigned*, why he should not,

from the beginning have discovered such things as make for their good, but defer the doing it till the time of Tiberius? *Since the sooner this was done, the greater would his goodness appear.*

And again, *How is it consistent with the notion of God's being universally benevolent, not to have revealed it to all his children, when all had equal need of it? Was it not as easy for him to have communicated it to all nations, as to any one nation or person? Or in all languages, as in one.*

Now, all this is fully answered by one great and fundamental principle—

For, if the relations between things and persons, and the fitness resulting from thence, be the sole Rule of God's actions; then, the *sole rule* or reason of God's revealing any thing to any man, or men, at any time, must have its *fitness resulting* from the Divine fore-knowledge of the effects of *such* a revelation, at *such* a time, and on *such* persons. If God do not act thus, he does not act according to the *relation* betwixt a *fore-knowing Creator*, and his free creatures. But if he do act according to a *fitness resulting* from this *relation*, and make or do not make revelations, according to his own *fore-knowledge* of the fitness of times, and per-

sons for them; then, to ask, how a God, *always equally* good, can make a Revelation at *any* time, and not make the *same* at *all* times, is as absurd as to ask, how a God, always equally good, can reveal that at one time, because it is a *proper* time for it, and not reveal it at any other time, though every other time is *improper* for it?

God's goodness, directed by his own foreknowledge of the *fitness* of times, and of the *state* and *actions* of free agents, deferred a certain Revelation to the time of *Tiberius;* because he *foresaw* it would then be an act of the *greatest* goodness, and have its *best effects* upon the world. To ask, therefore, *what reason can be assigned*, why so good and beneficial a Revelation was not *sooner*, or even from the *beginning* made to the world, is asking, *What reason can be assigned*, why God is good, and intends the *greatest* good by what he does, or stays for the doing any thing, till such time as makes it a greater good than if he had done it sooner; it is asking, why God should act according to his *own fore-knowledge* of the *state* and *actions* of *free agents*, and order all things according to a fitness resulting from such a *fore-knowledge*?

Now, this appealing to God's Fore-knowledge of the state and actions of *free agents*, as the Cause of all that is particular in the *time* and *manner* of any revelation, and deducing its fitness from thence, cannot be said to be *begging the question* in dispute; but is resolving it directly according to the *Rule*, which is laid down for God to act by, which is this: That *the relations between things and persons*, and *the fitness resulting from thence*, *must be the sole rule of God's actions*, *unless he be an arbitrary being*.

But if this be the *sole Rule*, then God, in giving any revelation must act, as the *relation* betwixt a *fore-knowing* Creator and his *free* creatures requires; and his actions must have their *fitness resulting* from his fore-knowledge of the *state* and *actions* of free agents. But if this be God's sole rule, made necessary to him from the nature of things, then to ask why *this* or *that* revelation was given, *only* at *such* a time, is to ask, why God *only* does that which is *fit* for him to do? And to ask, why not the same revelation at any other time, is asking, why God does not do that, which it is *not fit* for him to do?

But, *Was it not as easy for God to have communicated it to all nations*, as to any one nation *or person? Or in all languages*, as in any one?

This argument is built upon the *truth* and *reasonableness* of this supposition, That God does things because they are *easy*, or forbears things because they are *difficult* to be performed. For, it can be no argument, that God ought to have revealed such things to *all* nations or persons, because it was as *easy* to him, as to do it to *any one* nation or person; unless it be supposed, that the *easiness* of a thing is a reason why God does it, and the difficulty of a thing a reason why he does not do it. But, if this supposition be very absurd, then the argument founded upon it must be liable to the same charge.

It is as easy to God to make all men conformable to his Will, as to make *trees* and *plants* grow according to his pleasure; but though it is as easy, yet it is not as *fit* and *reasonable* for God to do all by *power* in the rational world, as he does all by power in the vegetable. It is as easy for God to destroy all sinful natures, as to preserve them in being; and if he do one rather than the other, it is not because one is *easier* than the other, but because the perfections of his own nature move him to it.

But if God do things, not because they are easy, but because they are infinitely good and *fit to be done*, and founded in the *relation* of a *fore-knowing* Creator to his free creatures;

then, the reason why God has afforded different revelations to different ages and persons is this, That his *manner* of revealing every thing might be *worthy* of his own *fore-knowledge* of the effects of it; and that every thing, which is particular in the *time* or *manner* of any revelation, might have its *fitness resulting* from the *relation* betwixt a good God and his creatures, whose *changing* state, *different* conduct, *tempers*, and *actions* are all eternally fore-known by him.

Again; it is objected, that a Divine Revelation must either be the effect of *Justice*, or else of *Mercy* and *free Goodness;* but in either of these cases it ought to be *universal;* for justice must be done to all. But if it be the effect of *mercy* and *free goodness*, it is asked, *How a being can be denominated merciful and good, who is so only to a few, but cruel and unmerciful to the rest?*

It is answered, That there is neither *Justice* in God without Mercy, nor *Mercy* without Justice; and to ascribe a *Revelation* to either of them separately, in *contradistinction* to the other, has no more truth or reason in it, than to ascribe the *Creation* separately either to the *Wisdom*, or *Power* of God, in contradistinction to the other.

Secondly, ☞ A divine revelation is not owing to the *justice* or *free goodness* of God, either *separately* or *jointly* considered; but to the goodness, mercy, and justice of God, *governed* and *directed* by his eternal Fore-knowledge of all the effects of every revelation, at any, or all times.

God ordains a Revelation in this or that manner, time, and place; not because it is a *justice* that he cannot refuse, nor because it is matter of *favor* or *free* Goodness, and therefore may be given in any manner at pleasure; but because he has the whole *duration* of human things, the whole *race* of mankind, the whole *order* of human changes and events, the whole *combination* of all causes and effects of human tempers, all the *actions* of free agents, and *all the consequences* of every revelation plainly in his sight; and according to this eternal *Fore-knowledge*, every revelation receives every thing that is *particular* in it, either as to *time*, *matter*, *manner*, or *place*.

All complaints, therefore, about that which is *particular* or *seemingly* partial in the time and manner of any revelation, are very unjustifiable; and shew, that we are discontent at God's *proceedings*, because he acts like himself, does *what is best* and *fittest* to be done, and governs

the world, not according to our weak imaginations, but according to his own infinite perfections.

We will not allow a Providence to be *right*, unless we can comprehend and explain the reasonableness of all its steps; and yet it could not *possibly* be right, unless its proceedings were as much *above* our comprehension, as our wisdom is *below* that which is infinite.

For, if the *relations* of *things* and *persons*, and the *fitness* resulting from thence, be the *Rule* of God's actions; then, all the revelations that come from God, must have their *fitness* resulting from the relation his Fore-knowledge bears to the *various states*, *conditions*, *tempers*, and *actions* of free agents, and the *various effects* of every manner of revelation.

But, if God cannot act worthy of himself, in any manner of revelation, unless he act according to a fitness resulting from this relation; then we have the highest certainty, that he must act by a *Rule* that lies *out of our sight;* and that his Providence in this particular must be *incomprehensible* to us, for this very reason, because it has that very fitness, wisdom, and goodness in it, which it ought to have.

CHAP. III.

Shewing, how far human Reason is enabled to judge of the *reasonableness*, *truth*, and *certainty* of divine Revelation.

THE former chapter has plainly shewn, from the state and relation between God and man, that we must be strangers to the true reasons on which a divine Revelation is founded, both as to its *time*, *matter*, and *manner*.

But it is here objected, *If God, by reason of his own perfections, must be thus mysterious and incomprehensible, both in the matter and manner of divine Revelation; how can we know what revelations we are to receive as divine? How can we be blamed for rejecting this, or receiving that, if we cannot comprehend the reasons on which every Revelation is founded, both as to its matter and manner?*

Just as we may be blamed for some notions of God, and commended for others, though w can have no notions of God, but such as ar *mysterious* and *inconceivable*. We are not with out some natural capacity of judging right God, of finding out his perfections, and pr what is or is not worthy to be ascribed to

Yet, what the Divine perfections are in themselves, what they imply and contain in their own nature and manner of existence, is altogether mysterious and inconceivable by us, at present. If therefore a man may be blameable or commendable for his right or wrong belief of a God; then a man may be accountable for a right or wrong belief of such matters, as are in their own nature too mysterious for his comprehension. And, though a man knows the reasons of a Divine Revelation, either as to its *matter* or *manner*, as imperfectly as he knows the Divine nature; yet he may be as liable to account for believing *false revelations*, as for *idolatry;* and as full of guilt for rejecting a *true Revelation*, as for denying the only *true God.*

Secondly, Though we are insufficient for comprehending the *reasons*, on which the particular *matter* or *manner* of any Divine Revelation is founded; yet we may be so far sufficient judges of the *reasons* for *receiving* or not *receiving* a revelation as Divine, as to make our conduct therein justly accountable to God.

For, if God can shew a Revelation to proceed from him by the *same undeniable* evidence, as he shews the *Creation* to be his work; if he can *make himself* as visible in a particular extra-

ordinary mauner, as he is by his *general* and *ordinary* Providence, then, though we are as unqualified to judge of the mysteries of a *Revelation*, as we are to judge of the mysteries in *Creation* and *Providence;* yet, we may be as fully obliged to receive a Revelation, as to acknowledge the Creation to be the work of God; and as highly criminal for disbelieving it, as for denying a general Providence.

Adam, *Noah*, *Abraham*, and *Moses* were very incompetent judges of the reasons on which the particular Revelations made to them were founded; but this did not hinder their sufficient assurance, that such Revelations came from God; because, they were proved to come from God in the same manner, and for the same reasons, as the Creation is proved to be the Work of God.

And as *Adam* and *Noah* must see every thing *wonderful*, *mysterious*, and *above their comprehensions* in those new worlds, into which they were introduced by God; so they could no more expect that he should require nothing of them, but what they would enjoin themselves, than that their own *frame*, the *nature* of the creation, the *providence* of God, or the *state* of *human life*, should be exactly as they would

it.

And if their posterity will let no *messages* from heaven, no *prophecies* and *miracles* persuade them, that God can call them to any duties, but such as they must enjoin themselves; or to the belief of any doctrines, but such as their own minds can suggest; nor to any methods of changing their present state of weakness and disorder for a happy immortality but such as suit their own *taste*, *temper*, and *way of reasoning*; it is, because they are grown senseless of *the mysteries of creation* and *providence*, with which they are surrounded, and forget the awful prerogative of *infinite wisdom* over the weakest, lowest rank of intelligent beings.

For the *Excellence* of a Revelation is to be acknowledged by us, for the same reason that we are to acknowledge the excellence of Creation and Providence; not because they are wholly according to human conception, and have no mysteries, but because they are proved to be of God.

And a Revelation is to be received as coming from God, not because of its internal excellence, or because we judge it to be worthy of God; but because God has declared it to be *his, in as plain* and *undeniable* a manner, as he has declared *Creation* and Providence to be *his*.

For, though no Revelation can come from God, but what is truly worthy of him, and full of every internal excellence; yet, what is truly *worthy* of God to be *revealed*, cannot possibly be known by us, but by a Revelation from himself.

And, as we can only know what is worthy of God in Creation, by knowing what he has created; so we can no other way possibly know what is worthy of God to be revealed, but by a Revelation. And he that pretends, independently of any Revelation, to shew *how*, and in what manner God ought to make a Revelation worthy of himself, is as great a *Visionary*, as he that should pretend, independently of the Creation, or without learning any thing from it, to shew how God ought to have proceeded in it, to make it worthy of himself. For, as God alone knows how to create worthy of himself, and nothing can possibly be proved to be worthy to be created by him, but because he has already created it; so God alone knows what is worthy of himself in a Revelation, and nothing can possibly be proved worthy to be revealed by him, but because he has already revealed it.

Were it allowed that a Revelation cannot be *divine, if it* contain any thing *mysterious*, whose *and necessity* cannot be explained by hu-

man Reason, then neither *Creation* nor *Providence* can be proved to be divine; for they are both of them *more mysterious* than the Christian revelation. And Revelation itself is *therefore* mysterious, because Creation and Providence cannot be delivered from mystery. And, were it possible for man to comprehend the reasons, on which the *manner* of the Creation and divine Providence are founded, then Revelation might be without mysteries.

But, if the *Mysteries* in Revelation be owing to that, which is, by the nature of things incomprehensible in Creation and Providence, then, it is very *unreasonable* to reject Revelation, because it has that which it must necessarily have; not from itself, but from the nature and state of things. And much worse is it to deny Revelation to be divine, for such a reason, as makes it equally fit to deny *Creation* and *Providence* to be of God.

For, if every thing be *arbitrary*, whose *fitness and expedience* human Reason cannot *prove* and *explain*, then surely an *invisible over-ruling Providence*, that orders all things in a manner, and for reasons known only to its self; that subjects human life, and human affairs to what changes it pleases; that confounds the best laid *designs*, and makes great effects arise from fol-

ly and imprudence; that gives the race not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; that brings good men into affliction, and makes the wicked prosperous; surely *such a Providence* must be highly arbitrary.

And, therefore, if this argument be to be admitted, it leads directly to *Atheism*, and brings us under a greater necessity of rejecting this notion of divine Providence, on the account of its *mysteries*, than of rejecting a Revelation that is mysterious in any of its doctrines. And if God cannot be said to deal with us as rational agents, if he requires any thing of us, that *our Reason* cannot prove to be necessary, surely he cannot be said to deal with us as rational and moral agents, if he over-rule our persons and affairs, and disappoint our counsels; make weakness prosperous, and wisdom unsuccessful, in a *secret* and *invisible* manner, and for reasons and ends that we have no means of knowing.

And, if it may be said, To what purpose has he given us Reason, if that be not solely to give laws to us? surely it may better be said, to what purpose has he given us Reason to take care of ourselves, to provide for our happiness, to prepare *proper* means for certain ends, if *there be an over-ruling Providence*, that changes [illegible] *course* of things; that confounds

the best laid designs; and disappoints the wisest counsels?

☞ There is nothing therefore *half so mysterious* in *the Christian revelation*, considered in itself, as there is in that *invisible Providence*, which all must hold, who believe a God. And though there is enough plain in Providence, to excite the admiration of humble and pious minds, yet it has often been a rock of *Atheism* to those, who make *their own Reason* the measure of wisdom.

Again, though the *Creation* plainly declares the glory, and wisdom, and goodness of God; yet it has *more mysteries* in it, more things whose fitness, expedience, and reasonableness, human Reason cannot comprehend, than are to be found in Scripture.

If therefore he reason right, who says, *If there may be some things in a true Religion, whose fitness and expedience we cannot see, why not others? Nay, why not the whole? since that would make God's laws all of a piece. And, if the having of these things be no proof of its falsehood, how can any things fit and expedient [which no religion is without] be a proof of the truth of any one religion?* If I say, this be right reasoning, then it may be said, *If* there be things in *the Creation, whose fitness* we cannot see, why

not others? Nay, why not the whole? since that would make all God's works of a piece. And if the being of such things as these in the Creation be not a proof of its not being divine, how can the fitness and expedience of any Creation prove, that it is the work of God?

Thus does this argument tend wholly to Atheism, and concludes with the same force against *Creation* and *Providence*, as it does against Revelation.

The true grounds and reasons, on which we are to believe a Revelation to be divine, are such external marks and signs of God's action and operation, as are a sufficient proof of it. And if God have no ways of acting that are peculiar and particular to himself, and such as sufficiently prove his action and operation, then Revelation can have no sufficient proof that it comes from God.

And if a Revelation had no other proof of its Divinity, but such an internal excellency and fitness of its doctrines, as is fully known and approved by *human Reason;* such an internal excellency would be so far from being a sufficient proof of its Divinity, that it would be a probable objection against it. For it has an *appearance of* great probability, that God would *not make an* eternal Revelation of that only,

which was *sufficiently* and fully known without it.

Although, therefore, no Revelation can come from God, whose doctrines have not an *internal excellency*, and the *highest fitness;* yet the non-appearance of such excellency and fitness to *our Reason*, cannot be a disproof of its Divinity; because, it is our ignorance of such matters, without Revelation, which is the *true ground and reason* of God's revealing any thing to us.

The Credibility, therefore, of Divine Revelation rests chiefly upon *such external* evidence, as is a sufficient proof of the Divine operation, or interposition. If there be no such external evidence possible; if God has no ways of acting so *peculiar* to himself, as to be a *sufficient* proof of his action, then a Revelation cannot be sufficiently proved to be divine.

I appeal therefore to the *Miracles* and *Prophecies*, on which Christianity is founded, as a *sufficient* proof it is a Divine Revelation. And shall here consider, what is objected against the sufficiency of this kind of proof.

1. It is objected, That Miracles cannot prove *a false* or *bad* doctrine, to be true and good; *therefore* miracles, *as such*, cannot prove the

truth of any Revelation. But, though miracles cannot prove false to be true, or bad to be good, yet they may prove, that we ought to receive such doctrines, both as true and good, which we could not know to be true and good without such miracles.

Not because the miracles have any influence upon the things revealed, but because they testify the credibility of the Revealer, as having God's testimony to the truth of that which he reveals.

If therefore miracles can be a sufficient proof of God's sending any persons to speak in his name, and under his authority; then they may be a sufficient proof of the truth and divinity of a Revelation, though they cannot prove that which is false to be true.

But, *If evil beings can impress notions in men's minds as strongly as good beings, and cause miracles to be done in confirmation of them; is there any way to know to which of the two, notions, thus impressed, are owing, but from their nature and tendency, or internal marks of wisdom and goodness?——And if so, Can external proofs carry us any farther than the internal proofs do?*

This objection supposes, that no miracles, *as such,* can be a sufficient proof of the divinity

of a revelation; for this reason, because we do not know the extent of that power, which evil spirits have, of doing miracles. But this objection is groundless. For, granting that we do not know the nature and extent of that power which evil spirits may have; yet, if we know *enough* of it to affirm, that the *Creation* is not the work of evil spirits; if we can securely appeal to the Creation, as a *sufficient proof* of God's action and operation; then we are fully secure in appealing to miracles, as a sufficient proof of a Divine revelation.

For, if the Creation must of necessity be allowed to be the work of God, notwithstanding any *unknown degree* of power in evil spirits; if we can as certainly ascribe it to God, as if we really knew there were no *such* spirits; then miracles may be as full a proof of the operation, or interposition of God, as if we really knew there were no such spirits in being.

I do not ask, Whether the *same divine* perfection is necessary to foretel such things as are foretold in Scripture, and work such miracles as are there related, as is necessary to *create*. I do not ask, Whether any power less than Divine can do such things? I only ask, *Whether* there be any certainty, that the Creation is the work of God? Whether we can be

sure of the Divine operation, from the existence of that creation, which we are acquainted with? Or, whether we are in any *doubt* or *uncertainty* about it, because we do not know the *true nature* or *degree* of power, that may belong to evil spirits?

For, if it can be affirmed with certainty, that the Creation is the work of God, notwithstanding our uncertainty about the degree of power that may belong to evil spirits; then we have the same certainty, that the *Prophecies* and *Miracles* recorded in Scripture are to be ascribed to God, as his doing, notwithstanding our uncertainty of the power of evil spirits.

And this is affirmed, not because *Prophecies* and *Miracles* require the *same degree* of Divine power, as to create *ex nihilo* [for that would be affirming we know not what] but it is affirmed, because the Creation cannot be a *better, farther*, or *different* proof of the action or operation of God, than such miracles and prophecies are.

For, every reason for ascribing the creation to God, is the same reason for ascribing such miracles and prophecies to God; and every argument against the certainty of those miracles and prophecies coming from God, is the same *argument* against the certainty of the Crea- *being* the work of God; for there cannot

be more or less certainty in one case than in the other.

For, if evil spirits have so the creation in their hands, that by reason of their power over it, *no miracles* can prove the operation of God, then the operation of God cannot be proved from the Creation itself

For the Creation cannot be proved to be the operation of God, unless it can be proved that God *still presides* over it.

And if *all* that, which is extraordinary and miraculous, may be accounted for without the interposition of God; then nothing that is ordinary and common, according to the course of nature, can be a proof of the action of God. For there can be no reason assigned, why that which is *ordinary* should be ascribed to God, if all that is, or has, or can be *miraculous*, may be ascribed to evil spirits.

Either therefore it must be said, that there are or may be miracles, which cannot be the effects of evil spirits; or else, nothing that is ordinary and common can be a proof of the operation of God. For, if nothing miraculous can be an undeniable proof of God's action, nothing created can be a proof of it.

The matter, therefore, stands thus: There *are, and* may be, Miracles, that cannot be as-

cribed to evil spirits, without ascribing the Creation to them; and which can no more be doubted to come from God, than we can doubt of his being the Creator of the world. There may be miracles therefore, which, *as such*, and, considered *in themselves*, are as full a proof of the *truth* of that which they attest, as the Creation is of the *fitness* of that which is created.

And though the *matter* of a Revelation is to be attended to, that we may fully understand it, and be rightly affected with it; yet the reason of our receiving it as Divine, must rest upon that *external authority*, which shews it to be of God.

And the authority of Miracles, sufficiently plain and apparent, are of themselves a full and necessary reason for receiving a Revelation, which, both as to its *matter* and *manner*, would not be approved by us without them.

It seems therefore, to be a *needless*, and too *great* a concession, which some *learned divines* make in this matter, when they grant, that we must first examine the Doctrines revealed by Miracles, and see whether they contain any thing in them *absurd*, or *unworthy* of God, before we can receive the Miracles as divine. *For*,

1. Where there can be nothing doubted, nor any more required, to make the Miracles sufficiently plain and evident, there can be no doubt about the truth and goodness of the Doctrine they attest. Miracles, in such a state as this, are the last resort; they determine for themselves, and cannot be tried by any thing farther.

And as the *existence* of things is the highest and utmost evidence of God's having created them, and is not to be tried by *our judgments* about the reasonableness and ends of their creation; so a course of plain undeniable Miracles, attesting the truth of a Revelation, is the *highest* and *utmost evidence* of its coming from God, and is not to be tried by our judgments about the *reasonableness* or *necessity* of its doctrines.

And this is to be affirmed, not because God is too good to suffer us to be brought into such a snare, but because we can know nothing of God, if such a course of Miracles be not a sufficient proof of his action and interposition. For if Doctrines, revealed by such an *undeniable change* in the natural course of things, have not thence a sufficient proof, that they are *Divine doctrines*; then no Laws, that are accord-

ing to the natural state of things, can have *thence* any proof, that they are *Divine laws*.

For if *no course* of *miracles* can be of *its self* a sufficient prove, that *that* which is attested by them, is attested by God; then no *settled, ordinary* state of things can of *its self* be a proof, that *that* which is required by the natural state of things, is required by God.

2. To try Miracles, sufficiently plain and evident, by *our judgments* of the reasonableness of the doctrines revealed by them, seems to be beginning at the wrong end. For the Doctrines had not been revealed, but because of our ignorance of the *nature* and *reasonableness* of them; nor had the Miracles been wrought, but to *prevent* our *acquiescing* in our own judgments about the worth and value of them.

3. To say, That no Miracles, however plain and evident, are to be received as Divine, if they attest any Doctrine that appears to *human Reason* to be absurd, or unworthy of God, is very unreasonable. For what is it that can be called *human Reason* in this respect? Is it any thing else than human opinion? And is there any thing in which mankind are in greater uncertainty, or more contrary to one another, than *opinions* about what is absurd, or unworthy of *God* in religion? And is it not the

very end and design of a Divine Revelation, to help us to a Rule that may put an end to the divisions of human Reason, and furnish us with an authority for believing such things as we should not think it reasonable to believe without it.

And how weak and useless must that Revelation be, which has not sufficient authority to teach us *new notions* of religion, and persuade us to believe that to be reasonable and worthy of God, which we could not believe to be so upon a less authority.

But if this be the case, as it seems clearly to be, then we are not to try plain and evident Miracles of the highest kind, by *our judgments* of the reasonableness of the doctrines revealed by them; but Miracles are to be received, as of sufficient authority to form and govern our opinions about the reasonableness of the doctrines.

It may perhaps be said, though the authority of Miracles is sufficient to govern our opinions in doctrines that are only mysterious, and above the comprehension of our Reason; yet that which is plainly and grossly absurd, or unworthy of God, cannot, nor ought to be received *upon* any authority of the greatest Miracle

This objection is vain and absurd; it is vain, because it relates to a case, that never was the case of Miracles; and it is absurd, because it is providing against a case that never can happen to Miracles. For to suppose any thing in its own nature grossly absurd, or unworthy of God, to be attested with the highest evidence of miracles, is as impossible and contradictory a supposition, as to suppose God to create rational beings wicked in their nature; that they might thereby be of service to the devil. These two suppositions have not the smallest difference, either in absurdity, or impossibility.

Again, The history of magical wonders, and extraordinary things done by evil spirits, is no objection against the sufficiency of that proof that arises from Miracles. For, the question is not, whether nothing that is extraordinary can be done by evil spirits, in any circumstances, but whether nothing that is miraculous can, as such, be a proof of its being done by God. For these two cases are very consistent; it may be very possible for evil spirits to do things extraordinary in some circumstances, as where people enter into contracts with them, and resign themselves up to their power, and yet that

cles may, in other circumstances, merely

as Miracles, be a sufficient proof of their being done by God.

Thus the case of the *Egyptian magicians*, is so far from abating the weight of miracles, that it is a great proof of their authority, considered in themselves. For the *Magicians* could proceed but a little way in their contention with *Moses;* they were soon made to feel his superior power in the same manner, as the rest of the *Egyptians* did, and to confess that his Miracles were done by the *Finger of God.* This very instance therefore fully shews, that Miracles, *as such*, may be a sufficient proof of God's interposition. For if, in the case of a contention, the superior power must be ascribed to God, then Miracles as *such*, or of *such a kind*, as having none equal to them, or able to stand against them, must, in such a state, be a sufficient proof of their being done by God, and give a sufficient warrant to receive any Doctrine that is attested by them.

For, let it be supposed, that the *Egyptian* Magicians had destroyed the power of *Moses*, and brought all the *miraculous evils* upon the *Israelites*, as enemies of the *Egyptian* Gods, which he brought upon them; what consequence must *Reason* have drawn from such an *event? Could Reason* have proved, that the God

that made the world was *one* God, and that he alone ought to be worshipped? Or that the *Egyptians* ought to have left their Gods, who had the *whole Creation* in their hands in such a manner, as to change the nature of things as they pleased, and destroy every power that opposed them.

Now, either the case here supposed is possible, or it is impossible. If it be possible, then all the reasons for worshipping the *one true God*, taken from the *nature* and *state* of the creation, may entirely cease, and be so many reasons for idolatrous worship. For no one can have any reasons for worshipping the one true God, from the nature and state of the Creation, if other Gods have the greatest power over it, and can turn every thing into a *plague* upon those that do not worship them.

But if this case be impossible, then it necessarily follows, that Miracles, *as such*, and considered *in themselves*, may be certain and infallible proofs of God's interposition. For this case can only be impossible, because the greatest, plainest Miracles cannot possibly be on the side of error. But if this cannot be, then the plainest Miracles, *as such*, and considered *in themselves*, are an infallible mark of

And he that abides by Miracles in such circumstances, as proofs of the operation of the *one true* God, has the same certainty of proceeding right, as he that takes the state and nature of the Creation to be the effect of the one true God.

And as Miracles, thus considered in themselves, are the highest and most undeniable evidence of the truth and divinity of any Revelation; so Christianity stands fully distinguished from all other religions, by the highest and most undeniable evidence; since it has all the proof that the *highest state* of Miracles can give, and every other religion is without any support from them.

Thus I have, from a consideration of the state and condition of man, and the several relations which God stands in towards his creatures, shewn, that it is utterly impossible for human Reason to be a competent judge of the fitness, or unfitness, of all that God may, or may not, require of us. The two following chapters shall state the nature and perfection of Reason, considered in itself, or as it is a faculty, or principle of action in human nature.

CHAP. IV.

Of the state and nature of REASON, as it is in man; and how its perfection in matters of Religion is to be known.

PEOPLE, who take to themselves the name of *Free-thinkers*, make their court to the world, by pretending to vindicate the right that all men have, to judge and act according to their own Reason. Though, I think, the world have no more to thank them for on this account, than if they had pretended to assert the right that every man has, to see *only* with his *own eyes*, or to hear *only* with his *own ears*.

For their own Reason always did, does, and ever will, govern rational creatures, in every thing they determine, either in speculation or practice. It is not a matter of *duty* for men to use their own Reason, but of *necessity:* and it is as impossible to do otherwise, as for a Being, that cannot act but from choice, to act without choice. And if a man were to try not to act according to his own Reason or Choice, he would find himself under the same difficulty, *as he that* tries to think, without thinking *upon something.*

And if God were to command us, by fresh revelations, every day of our lives, not to act from a principle of Reason and Choice, such revelations could have no more effect upon us, than if they came from the weakest amongst mankind. For, as our principle of acting is not derived from ourselves, so it is no more in our power to alter it, or contradict it, than it is in the power of matter not to *gravitate*, or to exist, without taking up some *place*.

Man is under the same necessity of acting from his own choice, that *matter* is of not acting at all; and a being, whose principle of action is Reason and Choice, can no more act without it, or contrary to it, than an extended being can be without extension.

All men, therefore, are equally reasonable in this respect, that they are, and must be, by a *necessity* of nature, equally directed and governed by their own Reason and Choice.

For, as the principle of action, in human nature, is *Reason* and *Choice*, and nothing can be done, or believed, but for *some reason*, any more than a thing can be chosen, and not be chosen; so the acting according to one's own Reason, is not the privilege of the *Philosopher*, but essentially to human nature; and as inseparable

from all persons, as self-consciousness, or a sense of their own existence.

The dispute, therefore, betwixt *Christians* and *Unbelievers*, concerning Reason, is not, whether men are to use their *own Reason*, any more, than whether they are to see with their *own eyes;* but whether every man's Reason must needs guide him by its *own light*, or must cease to guide him, as soon as it guides him by a light borrowed from Revelation? This is the true state of the question; not *whether* Reason is to be followed, but when it is *best* followed? not whether it is to be our *Guide*, but how it may be made our *safest guide.*

The *Free-thinkers*, therefore, rather appeal to the Passions, than the Reason of the people, when they represent the Clergy and Christianity as enemies to Reason, and just thinking, and themselves as friends and advocates for the use of Reason.

For, Christians pretend to no guide, but under the guidance of their Reason; nor to assert any thing, but because it cannot be reasonably denied. They oppose unbelievers, not because they *reason*, but because they reason *ill.* They receive Revelation, not to suppress [illegible] *power*, but to improve the light of their [illegible]*son;* not to take away their right of judg-

ing for themselves, but to secure them from false Judgments; and whatever is required to be believed, or practised, by Revelation, is only so far required, as there is reason for it; or because it is more reasonable than the contrary.

If, therefore, a poor peasant should call upon our Free-thinkers, to lay aside their *bigotry* to *ideas*, *arguments*, and *philosophy*, and govern themselves by Reason; it would be no more absurd, than for them to exhort Christians to lay aside their bigotry to *creeds* and *doctrines* of Revelation, and to govern themselves by Reason.

For it may as well be affirmed, that a man departs from the use of his Reason, because he depends upon *ideas*, *arguments*, and *syllogisms*; as that he departs from the use of his Reason, because he proceeds upon *Prophecies*, *Miracles*, and *Revelations*.

And if he use his Reason weakly, and be subject to delusion in these points, he no more renounces his Reason, or goes over to another direction, than *Hobbes*, *Spinosa*, *Bayle*, *Collins*, or *Toland*, renounce their Reason, when they take their own *fancies* to be demonstrations.

Christians, therefore, do not differ from unbelievers, in the constant use of their Reason

but in *the manner* of using it: as *virtuous* men differ from *Rakes*, not in their desire of happiness, but in their manner of seeking it.

It appears from what has been said, that, Every man's own Reason is his only principle of action; and that he must judge according to it, whether he receives, or rejects, Revelation.

Now, although every man is to judge according to the light of his own Reason, yet his Reason has very little light that can be called *its own*. For, as we derive our nature from our parents, so that which we call generally *natural knowledge*, or the light of *nature*, is a knowledge and light that is made natural to us, by the *same authority* which makes a certain *language*, certain *customs*, and *modes* of behavior, natural to us.

Nothing seems to be our own, but a *bare capacity* to be instructed, a nature *fitted* for any impressions; as capable of vice as virtue; as ready to be made a vicious animal, as a religious rational creature; as liable to be made a *Hottentot*, by being born among Hottentots, as to be a *Christian*, by being born among Christians.

our moral and religious knowledge
imputed to the internal light of our
and *Nature*, but to the happiness

of having been born amongst reasonable beings, who have made a sense of religion and morality as natural to our minds, as *articulate language* to our tongues.

It is not my intention by this, to signify that there is not a *good* and *evil*, *right* and *wrong*, founded in the nature of things; or that morality has any dependance upon the *opinions* or *customs* of men; but only to shew, that we *find* out this right and wrong, come to a *sense* of this good and evil, not by any inward strength, or light, that nature of itself affords, but by such *external means*, as those by which people are taught *articulate* language, *civility*, *politeness*, or any other *rules* of civil life.

Men do not prefer virtue to vice, from a philosophical contemplation of the fitness of the one, and the unfitness of the other, founded in the nature of things; but because it is a judgment as *early* in their minds, as their knowledge of the words, Virtue and Vice.

And it can no more be reasonably affirmed, that our knowledge of God and Divine things, our opinions in morality, of the excellency of this or that virtue, of the immortality of our souls, of a future life, of rewards and punishments, *are the* effects of our natural light, than *it can be reasonably affirmed, that our living in*

If our light be little more than the opinions and customs of those amongst whom we live, and it be so hard for a man to arrive at a greater wisdom, than the common wisdom of the *place* or *country* which gave him birth and education; how unreasonably do we appeal to the perfection and sufficiency of our own Reason, against the *necessity* and *advantage* of Divine Revelation?

If we be *nothing* without the assistance of men; if we be a kind of foolish, helpless animals, till education and experience have *revealed* to us the wisdom and knowledge of our fellow-creatures; shall we think ourselves too wise, and full of our own light, to be farther enlightened with a knowledge and wisdom revealed to us by God himself?

May one not therefore justly wonder, what it is that could lead any people into an imagination of the absolute perfection of *human Reason?* There seems no more in the state of mankind to betray a man into this fancy, than to persuade him that the reason of *Infants* is absolutely perfect. For sense and experience are as full and strong a proof against one, as against the other.

But it must be said for these writers, that *they decline* all arguments from facts and ex-

perience, to give a better account of human nature; but with the same justice, as if a man were to lay aside the authority of *history*, to give you a truer account of the life of *Alexander*.

They argue about the perfection of human Reason, not as if it were something *already* in being, that had its *nature* and *condition*, and shewed itself to be what it is; but as if it were something that might take its state and condition, according to their fancies and speculations about it.

Their objection against Revelation is founded upon the pretended sufficiency and absolute perfection, of the light and strength of human Reason, to teach all men all that is wise, and holy, and Divine, in Religion. But how do they *prove* this perfection of human Reason? Do they appeal to Mankind as proofs of this perfection? Do they produce any body of men, in this, or any other age of the world, that without any assistance from Revelation, have attained to this perfection of religious knowledge? This is not so much as pretended to: the history of such men is entirely wanting. And yet the want of such a fact as this, has even the force of demonstration against *this* pretended sufficiency of natural Reason.

Because it is a matter not capable of any other kind of proof, but must be admitted as certainly true, or rejected as certainly false, according as fact and experience bear witness for or against it.

For an inquiry about the light, and strength, and sufficiency of Reason to guide and preserve men in the knowledge and practice of true religion, is a question, as *solely* to be resolved by *fact and experience*, as if the inquiry was about the *shape* of man's body, or the *number* of his senses. And to talk of a light and strength of Reason, natural to man, which fact and experience have never yet proved, is as egregious nonsense, as to talk of natural senses, or faculties of his body, which fact and experience have never yet discovered.

For, as the *existence* of man cannot be proved, but from fact and experience; so every *quality* of man, whether of body or mind, and every degree of that quality, can only be proved by fact and experience.

The degrees of human *strength*, the nature of human *passions*; the duration of human *life*; the light and strength of human *Reason* in matters of religion, are things not possible to be *own in any other degree*; than so *far* as fact *xperience* prove them.

From the bare consideration of a rational soul in union with a body, and bodily passions, we can neither prove man to be *strong* or *weak*, *good* or *bad*, *sickly* or *sound*, *mortal* or *immortal:* all these qualities must discover themselves, as the *eye* discovers its degree of *sight*, the *hand* its degree of *strength*, &c.

To inquire, therefore, whether men have, by nature, light and strength sufficient to guide, and keep them in the true religion? is the same appeal to fact and experience, as to inquire, whether men are *mortal*, *sickly*, or *sound;* or how far they can *see* and *hear*. For nothing that relates to human nature, as a quality of it, can possibly have any other proof.

If some other inquirers into human nature, should affirm, that there is in mankind a *natural instinct* of mutual love sufficient to make every man, at all times, love every other man, with the *same degree* of affection as he loves himself; I suppose such an opinion would be thought too absurd and extravagant, to need any confutation. And yet all the absurdity of it would lie in this, that it affirmed something of the *sufficiency* of a natural quality in man, which could not be supported by a single instance of any one man, and was contrary to the

experience and history of every age of the world.

By what has been here said, I hope the reader will observe, that this inquiry about the perfection or imperfection, the strength or weakness of Reason in man, as to matters of religion, rests *wholly* upon fact and experience; and that therefore all speculative reasonings upon it are to be looked upon as idle and visionary, as a sick man's dreams about health; and as wholly to be rejected, as any speculative arguments that should pretend to prove, in spite of all facts and experience, the *immortality* and *unalterable* state of human bodies.

CHAP. V.

Shewing, that all the *mutability* of our tempers, the *disorders* of our passions, the *corruption* of our hearts, all the *reveries* of the imagination, all the *contradictions* and *absurdities* that are to be found in human opinions, are strictly, and precisely the mutability, disorders, corruption, and absurdities of *human Reason*.

It is the intent of this chapter to shew, that although common language ascribes a variety of faculties and principles to the soul, imputing this action to the blindness of our *passions*, that to the inconstancy of our *tempers;* one thing to the heat of our *imagination*, another to the coolness of our *reason;* yet, in strictness of truth, every thing that is done by us is the action and operation of our Reason, and is to be ascribed to it, as the sole faculty or principle from whence it proceeded, and by which it is governed and effected.

Nobody denies, that there is a *Law* or *Light* of Reason common to men. All this is as freely granted, as that *love* and *hatred*, *feeling* and *sensation* are common to men; and is granting no more, than that men are by nature intelligent and rational Beings. For the faculties of

man, as he is an intelligent being, as necessarily perceive some difference in actions, as to *good* and *bad*, as they perceive some things they like, and some things they dislike. In this sense, there is a law, or light of Reason, common to all men; and the law of Reason is in men, as the law of *thinking*, of *liking*, and *disliking* is in men.

And the different degrees of Reason are in men, as the different degrees of love and aversion; as the different degrees of wit, parts, good nature, or ill nature, are in man.

And as all men have naturally more or less of these qualities, so all men have naturally more or less of Reason: and the bulk of mankind are as different in Reason, as they are in these qualities.

As Love is the same passion in all men, yet is infinitely different; as Hatred is the same passion in all men, yet with infinite differences; so Reason is the same faculty in all men, yet with infinite differences.

And as our passions not only make us different from other men, but frequently, and almost daily, different from ourselves, loving and hating under great inconstancy; so our Reason is *not only* different from the Reason of other *men, but* is often different from itself by a

strange inconstancy, setting up first one opinion, and then another.

So that when we talk of *human Reason*, or a Reason *common* to mankind, we talk of as *various*, *uncertain*, and *unmeasurable* a thing, as when we talk of a *love*, a *liking*, an *aversion*, a *good nature* or *ill nature*, common to mankind; for these qualities admit of no variation, uncertainty, or mutability, but such as they directly receive from the *Reason* of mankind.

For it is as much the Reason of man that acts in all these tempers, and makes them to be just what they are, as it is the Reason of man that demonstrates a mathematical proposition.

Was our Reason steady, and of one kind, there would be just the same steadiness and regularity in our tempers; did not Reason fall into mistakes, follies, and absurdities, we should have nothing foolish or absurd in our love or aversion. For every humor, every kind of love or aversion, is as strictly the *action* or *operation* of our Reason, as judgment is the act of our Reason.

And the tempers and passions of a child differ only from the tempers and passions of a man, exactly in the same degree, as the Reason of a child differs from the Reason of man.

So that our passions and tempers are the natural actions and real effects of our Reason, and have no qualities, either good or bad, but such as are to be imputed to it.

A laudable good nature, or a laudable aversion, is only Reason acting in a *certain manner;* a criminal good nature, or a criminal aversion, is nothing else, but an ill-judging Reason; that is, Reason acting in another certain manner.

But still it is Reason, or our understanding, that is the *only agent* in our bad passions, as well as good passions; and as much the *sole agent* in all our passions and tempers, as in things of mere speculation.

So that the state of Reason in human life, is nothing else but the state of human tempers and passions; and *right Reason* in morality, is nothing else but *right love* and *right aversion.*

And all our tempers and ways of liking and disliking, are as much the acts and operations of our Reason, as the wisest actions of our life; and they only differ from Reason, as Reason differs from itself, when it judges rightly, and when it judges erroneously.

All that, therefore, which we commonly call weakness, blindness, and disorder of our *ons, is* in reality the weakness, blindness *sorder of our Reason.* For a right love.

or wrong love, denotes only our Reason acting in a *certain particular manner.*

So that if any thing can be said precisely, or with exactness, of love, aversion, good nature or ill nature, as common to mankind; the same may be said of Reason, as common to mankind.

And, if it would be very foolish and absurd, to ascribe an absolute perfection to human love, making it alone a sufficient guide to all good; or an absolute perfection to human hatred, as a sufficient preservative from all vice; it is equally absurd to ascribe the same perfection to human Reason: because neither love nor hatred have any thing perfect or imperfect, good or bad in them, but what is solely the action and operation of Reason.

For the distinction of our Reason from our Passions, is only a distinction in language, made at pleasure; and is no more real in the things themselves, than the *desire* and *inclination* are really different from the *Will.* All therefore that is weak and foolish in our passions, is the weakness and folly of our Reason; all the inconstancy and caprice of our humors and tempers, is the caprice and inconstancy of our Reason.

It is not *Flattery*, that compliments vice in *authority*; it is not Corruption that makes men

prostitute their honor; it is not *Sensuality*, that plunges men into *Debauchery;* it is not *Avarice*, that makes men sordid; it is not *Ambition*, that makes them restless; it is not *Bribery*, that makes men sell their consciences; it is not *Interest*, that makes them lie and cheat, and perjure themselves. What is it therefore? Why, it is *Reason*, the *use of Reason*, *human Reason*, that does all this.

To suppose that Reason permits itself to be governed by passions or tempers, but is not the *immediate, full agent* of all that is done by them, is as absurd, as to suppose that Reason permits itself to be governed by the *hand* when it is writing falsely, or the *tongue* when it is talking profanely, but is not the immediate, direct agent of all that is written and spoken by them.

Brutes are incapable of imprudence and immorality, because none of their actions are the actions of *Reason:* every thing therefore that is imprudence, immorality, baseness, or villany in us, must be the act of our Reason; otherwise it could no more be imprudent or immoral, than the actions of brutes.

If, therefore, Reason be the only faculty that *tinguisheth* us from brutes; it necessarily *vs, that* those irregularities, whether of

humor, passions, or tempers, which cannot be imputed to brutes, must be solely attributed to that faculty by which we are distinguished from brutes; and consequently, every thing that is foolish, vain, shameful, false, treacherous, and base, must be the sole express acts of our Reason; since, if they were the acts of any thing else, they could have no more vanity, falsehood, or baseness, than hunger and thirst.

As therefore all that is faithful, just, and wise, can only be attributed to that which is done by our Reason; so, by plain consequence, all that is vain, false, or shameful, can only be imputed to any acts, as they are the acts of Reason.

It is not my intent in the least to censure or condemn our common language, which considers and talks of Reason and the Passions, as if they were as different as a *governor* and his *subjects*.

These forms of speech are very intelligible and useful, and give great life and ornament to all discourses upon morality; and are even necessary both for the Historian, the Poet, and the Orator.

But, when certain persons ascribe to human Reason, as a *distinct* faculty of human nature, *I know* not what *perfection*, it is necessary to

consider human Reason and human Nature, not as it is represented in common language, but as it is in reality in itself.

Notwithstanding, therefore, in common language, our Passions, and the effects of them, are very usefully distinguished from our Reason, I have here ventured to shew, that all the disorders of human nature, are precisely the disorders of human Reason; and that all the perfection or imperfection of our passions, is nothing else but the perfection or imperfection of our Reason.

And we may as well think, that judgment, prudence, discretion, are things different from our Reason, as that humor, temper, approbation, or aversion, are really different from our Reason.

For, as it is a right exercise of Reason, that denominates its actions to be *Prudence*, *Judgment*, and *Discretion;* so it is a wrong exercise of Reason, that denominates its actions to be *Humor*, *Temper*, and *Caprice.*

And it would be as absurd to condemn humor and caprice, if they were not the actions and operations of Reason, as to commend a prudence and discretion, that were the effects of *an irrational* principle.

Our follies, therefore, and absurdities of every kind, are as necessarily to be ascribed to our Reason, as the *first immediate*, and *sole* Cause of them, as our wisdom and discretion are to be ascribed to it in that degree.

The difference betwixt Reason assenting to the properties of a *square*, and Reason acting in motions of *desire* or *aversion*, is only this, that in the latter case it is Reason, acting under a sense of *good* or *evil*, in the former case, it is Reason acting under a sense of *magnitude*.

And as the relations of magnitude, as they are the objects of our Reason, are only the objects of its *assent* or *dissent;* so good and evil, as they are objects of our Reason, are only the objects of its *desire* or *aversion:* and as the assent or dissent, in matters of speculation, whether right or wrong, is solely the act of our Reason; so desire or aversion, in human life, whether right or wrong, is equally the act of our Reason.

All the good, therefore, that there is in any of our desires or aversions, is the good of our Reason; and all the evil or blindness there is in any of our passions, is solely the evil and blindness of our Reason.

Because love, desire, aversion, denote nothing *else* but our Reason acting in a certain way

ner; just as prudence, discretion, and judgment, denote nothing else but our Reason acting in a certain manner.

We often say, that our Passions deceive us, or persuade us; but this is no more strictly so, than when we say, our *interest* deceived, or a *bribe* blinded us. For bribes and interest are not active principles, nor have any power of deception; it is only our Reason that gives them a false value, and prefers them to a greater good.

It is just so, in what we call the deceit of our Passions: they meddle with us no more than bribes meddle with us; but that pleasurable perception, which is to be found in certain enjoyments, is by our Reason preferred to that better good, which we might expect from a self-denial.

We say again, that our Passions paint things in false colors, and present to our minds vain appearances of happiness.

But this is no more strictly true, than when we say, our *Imagination* forms castles in the air. For the imagination signifies no distinct faculty from our Reason, but only, Reason acting upon our *own ideas.*

So, when our Passions are said to give false *s to things*, or present vain appearances

of happiness, it is only our Reason acting upon its own ideas of *good* and *evil*, just as it acts upon its own ideas of *architecture*, in forming castles in the air.

So that, all that which we call different faculties of the soul, tempers and passions of the heart, strictly speaking, means nothing else but the various acts and operations of one and the same rational principle; which has different names, according to *the objects* which it acts upon, and *the manner* of its acting.

In some things it is called speculative, in others it is called practical Reason. And we may as justly think our speculative Reason is a different faculty from our practical Reason, as that our tempers, aversions, or likings, are not as fully and solely to be ascribed to our Reason, as syllogisms and demonstrations.

For, it is our Reason alone that chooses the true good; so it is our Reason alone that chooses the false good: as it is Reason alone that is the agent, when purity and integrity are preferred to sensual pleasure, and secular advantage; so it is our Reason alone that is the agent, when sensual pleasure, and secular advantage, are preferred to purity and integrity.

For the same Principle, which is the agent

of all that is good in us, must be equally the agent of all that is evil.

All virtue is nothing else, but Reason acting in a certain manner; and all vice is nothing else, but Reason acting in a certain contrary manner. All the difference is in the actions, and none at all in the agent.

And to say, that Reason acts in our virtues, and Passion acts in our vices, is as absurd, as to say the contrary, that Passion is the agent in our virtues, and Reason the agent in our vices. For the action or power of Reason is as much required to make any thing vicious, as to make any thing virtuous;

Every thing therefore that is chosen, whether it be good or bad, is the express act and operation of Reason.

Reason therefore is certainly the worst, as well as the best faculty that we have: as it is the only principle of virtue, so it is, as certainly, the sole cause of all that is base, horrid, and shameful in human life. As it alone can discover truth, so it alone leads us into the grossest errors.

It was as truly Reason that made *Medea* kill *her* children, that made *Cato* kill himself, *made* pagans offer human sacrifices to

idols; that made *Epicurus* deny a providence, *Mahomet* pretend a revelation; that made some men skeptics, others bigots; some enthusiasts, others profane; that made *Hobbes* assert all religion to be human invention, and *Spinosa* to declare trees, and stones, and animals, to be parts of God; that makes Free-thinkers deny freedom of will, and Fatalists exhort to a reformation of manners; that made *Vaux* a conspirator, and *Ludlow* a regicide; that made *Muggleton* a fanatic, and *Rochester* a libertine: it was as truly human Reason that did all these things, as it is human Reason that demonstrates mathematical propositions.

For as all mistakes in speculation are as much the acts and operation of Reason, as true conclusions; so all errors in duty, whether civil or religious, are as much the acts of our Reason, as the exercise of the most solid virtues.

Medea and *Cato* acted as truly according to the judgment of their Reason, at that time, as the *Confessor* that chooses rather to suffer, than deny his faith.

And the difference betwixt them does not consist in this, that one power or faculty of the mind, acted in one of them, and another faculty, or power of the mind, acted in another; but *is, that* Reason acted in one, and Passic

another; but purely in the different *state* of their Reason. For had not *Medea* and *Cato* thought it best to do what they did, at the time they did it, they would no more have done it, than the *Confessor* would choose to suffer rather than deny his faith, unless he had judged it best so to do.

It may indeed be well enough said in common language, that Passion made *Medea* and *Cato* to do as they did, just as it may be said of a man that affirms a *plenum*, or holds any speculative absurdity, that it is blindness or prejudice that keeps him in it. Not as if blindness or prejudice were powers or faculties of his mind, but as they signify the *ill state* of his Reason. Just so the passions may be said to govern men in their actions; not as if they were powers of the mind, but as they denote the disordered state of Reason. And whenever any thing is imputed to the strength and violence of our Passions, strictly speaking, it only means the weakness and low condition of our Reason at that time.

For reason governs as fully when our actions and tempers are ever so bad, as it does when our actions and tempers are sound and good, the *only* difference is, that Reason act-

ing well, governs in the one case, and Reason acting ill, governs in the other.

Just as it is the same Reason, that sometimes judges strictly right, which at other times judges exceeding wrong, in matters of speculation.

When therefore we say, that Reason governs the passions, it means no more, in strict truth, than that Reason governs itself; that it acts with deliberation and attention; does not yield to its first judgments or opinions, but uses second, and third thoughts.

So that, guarding against the Passions, is only guarding against its own first judgments and opinions; that is, guarding against itself.

To all this it may, perhaps, be objected, that our passions and tempers arise from bodily motions, and depend very much upon the state of our blood and animal spirits; and that, therefore, what we do under their commotions, cannot be attributed to our Reason.

It is readily granted, that the body has this share in our passions and tempers: but then the same thing must be granted of the body, in all the acts and operations of the mind. So that if our desires and aversions cannot be imputed to our Reason, as its acts, because of the joint operation of the animal spirits in them, no

more can syllogisms and demonstrations be attributed to our Reason as its operations, because the operation of bodily spirits concurreth in the forming of them.

For the most abstract thought, and calm speculation of the mind, has as truly the *concurrence*, and *conjunct* operation of bodily spirits, as our strongest desires or aversions. And it is as much owing to the state of the body that such speculations are what they are, as it is owing to the state of the body that such passions are what they are.

For the motions of the bodily spirits are inseparable from, and according to, the state and action of the mind: when Reason is in speculation of a trifle, they concur but *weakly;* when Reason speculates intensely, their operation is *increased*. And sometimes the attention of the mind is so great, and has so engaged and called in all the animal spirits to its assistance, that the operations of our senses are suspended, and we neither see nor feel, till the attention of the mind has let the spirits return to all parts of the body.

Now, will any one say, that these intense thoughts are less the acts of the mind, because [illegible] *a greater* concurrence of bodily spir-

its than when it is acting with indifference, and so has a lesser quantity of bodily spirits?

Yet this might as well be said, as to say, that the assent or dissent, in speculation, is the act of our Reason; but liking or disliking, loving or hating, are not so the acts of our Reason, because they have a greater concurrence, and different motions of bodily spirits.

For, as the mind is in a different state when it desires good, or fears evil, from what it is when it only compares two triangles; so the motions or concurrence of the bodily spirits have only *such* a difference as is strictly *correspondent* to these two states of the mind. They act and join as much in comparing the triangles, as in the desire of good, or fear of evil. And the mind is just so much governed by the body, in its passions, as it is governed by it in its calmest contemplations.

For as the gentle quiet operation of the animal spirits is then strictly correspondent, and entirely owing to the state and action of the mind; so in all our passions, the strong and increased motion of the animal spirits is then strictly correspondent, and entirely owing to the state and action of the mind.

So that Reason is neither more nor less the

agent in all our tempers and passions, than it is in our most dry and sedate speculations.

It may, and often does happen, that a man may have as great an eagerness and impatience in the solving a mathematical problem, as another hath to obtain any great good, or avoid any great evil.

But may it therefore be said, that it is not Reason that solves, or desires to solve, the problem, because the bodily spirits are so active in it?

In a word; if our passions and tempers might not be imputed to our Reason, as its own genuine acts and operations, because they have such a concurrence of bodily spirits, neither could arguing, or reasoning, be attributed to our *Reason*, as its proper act and operation, because in all argumentation the bodily spirits are necessarily employed; and the better and closer the reasoning is, the more they are excited and employed.

If it should farther be objected, that Reason is only *right Reason*, and therefore cannot be said to act or operate, but where, and so far, as right Reason acts.

This is as absurd as to say, that *Love* signifies *only pure love*, and *Hatred* just hatred; and therefore a man cannot be said to love or

hate, but when, and so far, as his love is pure, and his hatred just.—

To draw now some plain consequences from the foregoing account.

First, If Reason be, as above represented, the *universal Agent;* if all the difference amongst men, either in speculation or practice, be only such a difference as Reason makes, then nothing can be more extravagant, than to affirm any thing concerning the degree of perfection or imperfection of Reason, as common to man. It is as wild and romantic, as to pretend to state the measure of Folly and Wisdom, of Fear and Courage, of Pride and Humility, of good Humor and ill Humor, common to Mankind: for as these states of the Mind are only so many different states of Reason, so no uncertainty belongs to them, but what, in the *same degree* belongs to *Reason.*

Secondly, Granting that all matters of Religion must be agreeable to *right*, *unprejudiced* Reason; yet this could be no ground for receiving nothing in religion, but what *human* Reason could prove to be necessary: for *human* Reason is no more *right unprejudiced* Reason, than a sinner is *sinless*, or a man an *angel.*

Granting again, that a man may go a great way towards rectifying his Reason, and laying

aside its prejudices; yet no particular man can be a *better judge* of the rectitude of his *own Reason*, than he is of the rectitude of his own *self-love*, the sagacity of his own *understanding*, the brightness of his own *parts*, the justness of his own *eloquence*, and the depth of his own *judgment*.

For there is nothing to deceive him in *self-love*, in the opinion of his own *merit*, *wit*, *judgment*, and *eloquence*, but what has the same power to deceive him, in the opinion of his own Reason. And, if *it be the fate of most sects to be fondest of their ugliest brats*, none seem so inevitably exposed to this *fatality*, as those, whose Religion is to have no *form*, but such as it receives from their own hearts.

Thirdly, A man that has his Religion to choose, and with this previous privilege, that he need not allow any thing to be matter of religion, but what his own Reason can prove to be so, is in as fair a way to be governed by his *Passions*, as he that has his *condition* of life to choose, with the liberty of taking that, which his own Reason directs him to.

Does any one suppose now, that nothing but *right Reason* would direct him in the choice of his condition? Or that he would make the better *choice*, because he proceeded upon this

maxim, that nothing could be right, but that which was agreeable to his *own Reason?* Or that his temper, his prejudices, his self-love, his passions, his partiality, would have no influence upon his choice, because he had resigned himself up to his *own Reason.*

For as our choice of a condition of life is not a matter of speculation, but of good and evil; so however it is recommended to our Reason, it chiefly excites our passions; and our choice will be just as reasonable, as our tempers and passions are. And he, who is made the most positive of the sufficiency of his own Reason, will be the most likely to be governed by the blindness of his own Passions.

Now it is just the same in the choice of a Religion, as in the choice of a condition of life: as it is not a matter of speculation, but of *good* and *evil;* so, if it be left to be stated and determined by our *own Reason*, it rather appeals to our Tempers, than employs our Reason; and to resign ourselves up to our own Reason, to tell us what ought or not to be a matter of Religion, is only resigning ourselves up to our Tempers to take what we *like*, and refuse what we *dislike* in Religion.

For, it is not only natural and easy for him, who believes that nothing can be

part of Religion, but what his Reason can prove necessary to be so, to take that to be *fully proved*, which is only *mightily liked*; and all that to be entirely contrary to *Reason*, which is only vastly contrary to his *Tempers*; this, I say, is not only natural and easy to happen, but scarce possible to be avoided.

In a word; when *Self-love* is a proper arbitrator betwixt a man and his adversary; when *Revenge* is a just judge of Meekness; when *Pride* is a true lover of Humility; when *Falsehood* is a teacher of Truth; when *Lust* is a fast friend of Chastity; when the *Flesh* leads to the Spirit; when *Sensuality* delights in Self-denial; when *Partiality* is a promoter of Equity; when the *Palate* can taste the difference between Sin and Holiness; when the *Hand* can feel the truth of a Proposition, then may *human Reason* be a proper Arbitrator between God and Man; the sole, final, just Judge of all that ought, or ought not to be matter of a *Holy*, *Divine*, and *Heavenly* Religion.—

Again: if this be the state of Reason, as has been fully proved; if all we believe or disbelieve; love or hate, choose or refuse; if all that is wise or absurd, holy or profane, glorious *or shameful*, in thought, word, or deed, be to *be imputed* to it; then, it is as gross an ab-

surdity to talk of the perfection of *human Reason*, as, of the unspotted holiness of *human Life*, the absolute purity of *human Love*, the immutable justice of *human Hatred*, and the infallibility of *human Conjectures*.

Lastly, To pretend that our Reason is too perfect to be governed by any thing but its own light, is the same extravagance, as to pretend, that our love is *too pure* to be governed by any thing but its own inclinations, our hatred *too just* to be governed by any thing but its own motions. For, if all that is base and criminal in love, all that is unjust and wicked in hatred, be strictly and solely to be imputed to our Reason; then, no perfection can be ascribed to our Reason, but such as is to be ascribed to our love and hatred.

THE END.

BOOKS

recently from the Presses of, and for sale by,

S. T. Armstrong, Boston,

Buchanan's Christian Researches in Asia, 8vo. and a new edition 12mo just published; Owen's Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews; Foster's Essays; Gospel Treasury; Smith's Dissertation on the Prophecies; Evangelical Instructor; Saint's Everlasting Rest; The Panoplist and Magazine every month, 2,40 per year; Watts on the Terms of Christian Communion; Hymns for Infant Minds; Worcester's, Bogue's, Horne's and Buckminster's, Sermons; Saurin's Sermons, 7 vols.; Emerson on Baptism; Haweis' Spiritual Companion.

☞ *In Press,* — Abbot's Sermons to Mariners, and D. Brainerd's Life.

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